

Chapter 19

An Era of Totalitarianism

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Focus Questions

1. What are the distinctive features of a totalitarian state?
2. What motivated Stalin to make terror a government policy? What motivated Communist bureaucrats to participate in Stalin's inhumanities?
3. What were the essential features of the Fascist movements that arose in Europe after World War I?
4. What were Hitler's attitudes toward liberalism, war, race, the Jews, and propaganda?
5. In what ways did Nazism conflict with the core values of both the Enlightenment and Christianity? Why did the Nazi regime attract so many supporters?

6. What lessons might democratic societies draw from the Nazi experience?
7. Why and how did European intellectual and cultural life convey a mood of pessimism and disillusionment after World War I?
8. How did art and literature express a social conscience during the 1920s and 1930s?
9. What were the different ways that intellectuals struggled with the crisis of European society in an era of world wars and totalitarianism?
10. What were some of the conditions that gave rise to existentialism? What are the basic principles of existentialism?

In the 1930s, the term *totalitarianism* was used to describe the Fascist regime in Italy, the National Socialist regime in Germany, and the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. To a degree that far exceeds the ancient tyrannies and early modern autocratic states, these dictatorships aspired to and, with varying degrees of success, attained control over the individual's consciousness and behavior and all phases of political, social, and cultural life. To many people, it seemed that a crisis-riddled democracy was dying and that the future belonged to these dynamic totalitarian movements.

Totalitarianism was a twentieth-century phenomenon, for such all-embracing control over the individual and society could be achieved only in an age of modern ideology, technology, and bureaucracy. The totalitarian state was more completely established in Germany and the Soviet Union than in Italy, where cultural and historic conditions impeded the realization of the totalitarian goal of monolithic unity and total control.

The ideological aims and social and economic policies of Hitler and Stalin differed fundamentally. However, both Soviet Russia and

Nazi Germany shared the totalitarian goal of total domination of both the individual and institutions, and both employed similar methods to achieve it. Mussolini's Italy is more accurately called authoritarian, for the party-state either did not intend to control all phases of life or lacked the means to do so. Moreover, Mussolini hesitated to use the ruthless methods that Hitler and Stalin employed so readily. ❖

THE NATURE OF TOTALITARIANISM

Striving for total unity, control, and obedience, the totalitarian dictatorship is the antithesis of liberal democracy. It abolishes all competing political parties, suppresses individual liberty, eliminates or regulates private institutions, and utilizes the modern state's bureaucracy and technology to impose its ideology and enforce its commands. The party-state determines what people should believe—what values they should hold. There is no room for individual thinking, private moral judgment, or individual conscience. The individual possesses no natural rights that the state must respect. The state regards individuals merely as building blocks, the human material to be hammered and hewed into a new social order. It seeks to create an efficiently organized and stable society—one whose members do not raise troublesome questions or hold unorthodox opinions.

Nevertheless, the totalitarian dictatorship is also an unintended consequence of liberal democracy. It emerged in an age in which, because of the French and Industrial Revolutions, the masses had become a force in political life. The totalitarian leader seeks to gain and preserve power by harnessing mass support. Hitler, in particular, built a party within the existing constitutional system and exploited the electoral process in order to overthrow the democratic government.

Unlike previous dictatorial regimes, the dictatorships of both the left and the right sought to legitimize their rule by gaining the masses' approval. They claimed that their governments were higher and truer expressions of the people's will. The Soviet and Nazi dictatorships established their rule in the name of the people—the German Volk or the Soviet proletariat.

A distinctive feature of totalitarianism is the overriding importance of the leader, who is seen as infallible and invincible. The masses' slavish adulation of the leader and their uncritical acceptance of the dogma that the leader or the party is always right promote loyalty, dedication, and obedience and distort rational thinking.

Totalitarian leaders want more than power for its own sake; in the last analysis, they seek to transform the world according to an all-embracing ideology, a set of convictions and beliefs, which, says Hannah Arendt, "pretend[s] to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future."¹ The ideology constitutes a higher and exclusive truth based on a law of history or social development that, says Karl Dietrich Bracher, "reduce[s] the past and the future to a single historical principle of struggle, no matter whether by state, nation, people, race, or class."² The ideology contains a dazzling vision of the future—a secular New Jerusalem—that strengthens the will of the faithful and attracts converts. Like a religion, the totalitarian ideology provides its adherents with beliefs that make society and history intelligible, that explain all of existence in an emotionally gratifying way.

The ideology satisfies a human yearning for complete certitude. Like a religion, it creates true believers, who feel that they are participating in a great cause—a heroic fight against evil—that gives meaning to their lives. During World War II, a German soldier fighting on the Eastern front wrote to his brother that the battle "is for a new ideology, a new belief, a new life! I am glad that I can participate . . . in this war of light and darkness."³ Also like a religion, the totalitarian party gives isolated and alienated individuals a sense of belonging, a feeling of camaraderie; it enables a person to lose himself or herself in the comforting and exhilarating embrace of a mass movement.

Not only did the totalitarian religion-ideology supply followers with a cause that claimed absolute goodness, it also provided a Devil. For the Soviets, the source of evil and the cause of all the people's hardships were the degenerate capitalists, reactionary peasants who resisted collectivization, the traitorous Trotskyites, or the saboteurs and foreign agents who impeded the realization of the socialist society. For the Nazis, the Devil

was the conspirator Jew. These “evil” ones must be eliminated in order to realize the totalitarian movement’s vision of the future.

Thus, totalitarian regimes liquidate large segments of the population designated as “enemies of the people.” Historical necessity or a higher purpose demands and justifies their liquidation. The appeal to historical necessity has all the power of a great myth. Presented as a world-historical struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, the myth incites fanaticism and numbs the conscience. Traditional rules of morality have no meaning; seemingly decent people engage in terrible acts of brutality with no remorse, convinced that they are waging a righteous war.

Totalitarians are utopians inspired by idealism; they seek the salvation of their nation, their race, or humanity. They believe that the victory of their cause will usher in the millennium, a state of harmony and bliss. Such a vision is attractive to people burdened by economic insecurity or spiritual disorientation. The history of the twentieth century demonstrates how easily utopian beliefs can be twisted into paranoid fantasies, idealistic sentiments transformed into murderous fanaticism, and destructive components of human nature mobilized and directed by demagogues.

Unlike earlier autocratic regimes, the totalitarian dictatorship is not satisfied with its subjects’ outward obedience; it demands the masses’ unconditional loyalty and enthusiastic support. It strives to control the inner person—to shape thoughts, feelings, and attitudes in accordance with the party ideology, which becomes an official creed. It does not rule by brute force alone but seeks to create a “new man,” one who dedicates himself body and soul to the party and its ideology. Such unquestioning, faithful subjects can be manipulated by the party. The disinterested search for truth, justice, and goodness—the exploration of those fundamental moral, political, and religious questions that have characterized the Western intellectual tradition for centuries—is abandoned. Truth, justice, and goodness are what the party deems them to be, and ideological deviation is forbidden.

The totalitarian dictatorship deliberately politicizes all areas of human activity. Ideology pervades works of literature, history, philosophy, art, and even science. It dominates the school curriculum

and influences everyday speech and social relations. The state is concerned with everything its citizens do; there is no distinction between public and private life, and every institution comes under the party-state’s authority. If voluntary support for the regime cannot be generated by indoctrination, then the state unhesitatingly resorts to terror and violence to compel obedience. People live under a constant strain. Fear of the secret police is ever present; it produces a permanent state of insecurity, which induces people to do everything that the regime asks of them and to watch what they say and do.

COMMUNIST RUSSIA

In 1918, the infant Soviet government was threatened with civil war. Tsarist officers had gathered troops in the south; other anti-Communist centers rose in Siberia, and still others in the extreme north and along the Baltic coast. The political orientation of these anti-Communist groups, generally called Whites in contrast to the Communist Reds, combined all shades of opinion, from moderate socialist to reactionary, the latter usually predominating. Generally the Whites were monarchists who identified with the old tsarist regime. The Whites received support from foreign governments, which freely intervened. Until their own revolution in November 1918, the Germans occupied much of southern Russia. England, France, and the United States sent troops to points in northern and southern European Russia; England, Japan, and the United States also sent troops to Siberia. At first, they wanted to offset German expansion, but later they hoped to overthrow the Communist regime. In May and June 1918, Czech prisoners of war, about to be evacuated, precipitated anti-Communist uprisings along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, bringing the civil war to fever pitch. In July 1918, the Communists murdered Nicholas II and his entire family.

The Communists speeded the buildup of their own Red Army. Recruited from the remnants of the tsarist army and its officer corps, the Red Army was reinforced by compulsory military service and strict discipline; including the execution of deserters. Trotsky reintroduced the death penalty, which had been outlawed by the Provisional

Government. Threatened with death if they refused, many tsarist officers served in the Red Army. They were closely watched by Trotsky's ruthless political commissars, who were also responsible for the political reliability and morale of the troops. Trotsky ordered the formation of "blocking units" to machine-gun retreating soldiers. The civil war was brutal; both sides butchered civilians and their own comrades.

Hard-pressed as Lenin's party was, by the autumn of 1920 it had prevailed over its enemies. The Whites were divided among themselves and discredited by their association with the tsarist regime; the Communists had greater popular support, the advantage of interior communications, and superior political skills. The war-weary foreign interventionists called off their efforts to overthrow the Bolshevik regime by force.

The Communist victory in the civil war exacted a staggering price. Reds and Whites alike carried the tsarist tradition of political violence to a new pitch of horror. Some 1.2 million combatants on both sides perished. In addition, the Communists killed some 250,000 peasants who resisted grain requisitions and executed tens of thousands of political opponents. Adding to the death toll were some 100,000 Jews, victims of pogroms perpetrated largely by Whites and Ukrainian nationalists. Compounding the nation's anguish was the famine of 1921–1922, which claimed some five million victims.

War Communism and the New Economic Policy

Besides the extreme misery brought on by the world war and civil war, the Russian people had to endure the rigors of the policy known as War Communism. It was introduced in 1918 to deal with plummeting agricultural and economic production, rampant inflation, and desperate hunger in the cities. Under War Communism, the state took over the means of production and greatly limited the sphere of private ownership; it conscripted labor and, in effect, confiscated grain from the peasants in order to feed workers in the cities. War Communism devastated the economy even further and alienated workers and peasants. The state-run factories were mismanaged, workers

stayed away from their jobs or performed poorly, and peasants resisted the food requisition detachments that the government sent to seize their grain.

There was even open rebellion. In March 1921, sailors at the Kronstadt naval base and workers in nearby Petrograd—people who in 1917 had been ready to give their lives for the Revolution—rose against the repression that had been introduced during the civil war; they called for the establishment of socialist democracy. Trotsky ruthlessly suppressed that uprising, but the lesson was clear: the Communist regime had to implement a strategic retreat from War Communism and to restore a measure of stability to the country.

In 1921, the Communist Party adopted the New Economic Policy, called NEP, which lasted until 1928. Under a system that Lenin characterized as "state socialism," the government retained control of finance, industry, and transportation—"the commanding heights" of the economy—but allowed the rest of the economy to return to private enterprise. The peasants, after giving part of their crops to the government, were free to sell the rest in the open market; traders could buy and sell as they pleased. With the resumption of small-scale capitalism, an air of normal life returned.

One-Party Dictatorship

While the Communists were waging a fierce struggle against the Whites, they instituted a militant dictatorship run by their party. Numbering about five hundred thousand members in 1921, the Communist Party was controlled by a small, tight core of professional political leaders, the best of them unusually disciplined in personal dedication to the Revolution.

Under its constitution, the Russian Communist Party, as its formal title read, was a democratic body. Its members elected delegates to periodic party congresses; these in turn elected the membership of the central committee, which originally held the reins of leadership. However, power soon shifted to a smaller and more intimate group, the *politburo* (political bureau), which assumed a dictatorial role. The key leaders—Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and a few others—determined policy, assigned tasks, and appointed

important officials. The party dominated all public agencies; its leaders held the chief positions in government. No other political parties were tolerated, and trade unions became agents of the regime. Never before had the people of Russia been forced into such abject dependence on their government.

Impatient with the endless disputes among righteous and strong-willed old revolutionaries, Lenin, in agreement with other top leaders, demanded unconditional submission to his decisions. He even ordered that dissidents be disciplined and political enemies be terrorized. No price was too high to achieve monolithic party unity. Believing that they were creating a new and better society that would serve as a model for the rest of humanity, the Communists felt no moral objection to the use of force or even terror, including executions and forced-labor camps. The dreaded Cheka, a ruthless secret police organization, executed some two hundred thousand people from 1919 to 1925. The means Lenin employed for ruling his backward country denied the human values that Marx had taken from the Enlightenment and put into his vision of a socialist society. Lenin was perfectly willing to use state terror to promote the class struggle.

The Communists abolished the power of the Orthodox church, which was the traditional ally of tsarism and the enemy of innovation. They were militant atheists, believing with Marx that religion was the “opium of the people”; God had no place in their vision of a better society.

The Communists also simplified the alphabet, changed the calendar to the Gregorian system prevailing in the capitalist West, and brought theater and all arts, until then reserved for the elite, to the masses. Above all, they wiped out—by expropriation, discrimination, expulsion, and execution—the educated upper class of bureaucrats, landowners, professional people, and industrialists.

In the spring of 1918, Lenin argued that the Russian workers had not yet matched capitalist performance: “The Russian worker is a bad worker compared with the workers of the advanced, i.e., western countries.” To overcome this fatal handicap, Lenin relentlessly hammered home the need for “iron discipline at work” and “unquestioning obedience” to a single will,



FORGING SOCIALISM. Men and women work equally in this socialist realist propaganda poster from 1921.

that of the Communist Party. There was no alternative: “Large-scale machinery calls for absolute and strict unity of will, which directs the joint labors of hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of people. A thousand wills are subordinated to one will.”⁴ In these words lay the essence of subsequent Soviet industrialization. The entire economy was to be monolithic, rationally planned in its complex interdependence, and pursuing a single goal: overcoming the weaknesses of Russia, so disastrously demonstrated in the war.

In attempting to transform their Soviet Russia into a modern, industrialized, socialist state that would serve as a model for the world, the Communists imposed a new autocracy even more authoritarian than tsarism. The minds of the people came under unprecedented government control. In education, from kindergarten through university, in press and radio, and in literature and the arts, the Communist Party tried to fashion people’s thoughts to create the proper “consciousness.” The

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party made Marxism-Leninism the sole source of truth, eliminating as best it could all rival creeds, whether religious, political, or philosophical. Minds were to be as reliably uniform as machine processes and totally committed to the party, and they were to be protected against all subversive capitalist influences.

Lenin molded the Soviet Union into an international revolutionary force, the champion of anticapitalism and of the liberation of colonial peoples. The Russian Revolution inspired nationalistic ambitions for political self-determination and cultural self-assertion among a growing number of peoples around the world, especially in Asia. It appealed particularly to intellectuals educated in the West (or in westernized schools) yet identifying themselves with their downtrodden compatriots.

To have a political tool for world revolution Lenin created the Communist—or Third—International (Comintern). The most radical successor to earlier socialist international associations, it helped organize small Communist parties in Western Europe, which in time became dependable, although rather powerless, agents of Soviet Russia. In Asia, where no proletariat existed, Lenin tried to work closely with incipient nationalist movements. Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution gained the admiration and instinctive loyalty of colonial and semicolonial peoples in what would come to be called the Third World. Soviet Russia now stood out as the Communist alternative to the capitalist West.

THE STALIN REVOLUTION

Lenin died in 1924, and the task of achieving the goal that he had set was taken up by Stalin. The “man of steel” was crude and vulgar, toughened by the revolutionary underground and tsarist prisons and by the roughest aspects of Russian life. Relentlessly energetic but relatively inconspicuous among key Communists, Stalin had been given, in 1922, the unwanted and seemingly routine task of general secretary of the party. Shrewd and methodical, he used this position to his own advantage, building up a reliable party cadre—apparatus men, or *apparatchiki*, as they came to be called—and dominating the party as not even Lenin had done. When he was challenged, particularly by Trotsky and his associates, in the

protracted struggles for the succession to Lenin, it was too late to unseat him. None of Stalin’s rivals could rally the necessary majorities at the party congresses; none could match Stalin’s skill in party infighting or in making rough and anarchic people into docile members of the Communist Party apparatus.

Modernizing Russia: Industrialization and Collectivization

To Stalin, Russia’s most pressing need was not world revolution, but the fastest possible buildup of Soviet power through industrialization. The country could not afford to risk near-annihilation again, as it had done in the world war and then in the civil war. Communist pride dictated that the country be made as strong as possible. Stalin set forth the stark reckoning of Russian history in a speech delivered in 1931, three years after launching a program of massive industrialization.

Those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten. One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered for falling behind, for her backwardness. All beat her—for her backwardness, for military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness. She was beaten because to do so was profitable and could be done with impunity. . . . You are backward, you are weak—therefore you are wrong, hence you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty, therefore you are right, hence we must be wary of you. Such is the law of the exploiters. . . . That is why we must no longer lag behind.⁵

Stalin decided on all-out industrialization at the expense of the toiling masses. Peasants and workers, already poor, would be required to make tremendous sacrifices of body and spirit to overcome the nation’s weaknesses. Abandoning the NEP, Stalin decreed a series of Five-Year Plans, the first and most experimental one commencing in 1928. The industrialization drive was heralded as a vast economic and social revolution, undertaken by the

state according to a rational plan. The emphasis lay on heavy industry: the construction of railroads, power plants, steel mills, and military hardware such as tanks and warplanes. Production of consumer goods was cut to the minimum, and all small-scale private trading, revived under the NEP, came to an end—with disastrous results for the standard of living. Having just come within sight of their pre-1914 standard of living, Russians now found their expectations dashed for decades.

Thus, a new, grim age began, with drastic material hardships and profound anguish. Harsh punishments, including denial of food cards and imprisonment, were meted out for lateness, slowness, or incompetence. But many people, particularly the young, were fired to heroic exertions. They were proud to sacrifice themselves for the building of a superior society. And many common factory workers had the opportunity to attend school and become engineers and administrators, which tied them to the regime. When the Great Depression in the capitalist countries put millions out of work, no Soviet citizen suffered from unemployment; gloom pervaded the West, but confidence and hope, artificially fostered by the party, buoyed up many people in Soviet Russia. The first two Five-Year Plans dramatically and rapidly increased Russia's industrial infrastructure as factories, mines, dams, and railroads were feverishly constructed. At no time, though, did the planning produce Western-style efficiency, and workers, who labored in a herculean way, actually suffered a decline in real wages. The regime concentrated on heavy industry, not consumer goods or improving the standard of living.

Meanwhile, a second and far more brutal revolution overtook Soviet agriculture, for the peasants had to be forcibly integrated into the planned economy through collectivization. Agriculture—the peasants, their animals, and their fields—had to submit to the same rational control as industry. Collectivization meant the pooling of farmlands, animals, and equipment for the sake of more efficient, large-scale production. The Bolshevik solution for the backwardness of Russian agriculture was for the peasants to be organized like factory workers. But knowing the peasants' distaste for the factory, their attachment to their own land, and their stubbornness, the party had hesitated to carry out its ambitious scheme. In 1929, however,

Stalin believed that, for the sake of industrialization, he had no choice. If the Five-Year Plan was to succeed, the government had to receive planned crops of planned amounts and quality at planned times. This could only be accomplished, Stalin thought, by destroying the independent peasantry and creating huge agricultural factories. With collectivization, the ascendancy of the party over the people of Russia became almost complete.

The peasants paid a ghastly price. Stalin declared war on the Russian countryside. He ordered that the *kulaks*, the most enterprising and well-to-do peasants, be “liquidated as a class.” Many were killed outright, and millions were deported to forced-labor camps in the far north, where many ultimately perished from hunger or abuse. Their poorer and less efficient neighbors were herded onto collective farms at the point of a bayonet.

The peasants struck back, sometimes in pitched battles. The horror of forced collectivization broke the spirit even of hardened officials. “I am an old Bolshevik,” sobbed a secret police colonel to a fellow passenger on a train; “I worked in the underground against the Tsar and then I fought in the civil war. Did I do all that in order that I should now surround villages with machine guns and order my men to fire indiscriminately into crowds of peasants? Oh, no, no!”⁶ Typically, however, the local officials and activists who stripped the peasants of their possessions and searched for hidden grain viewed themselves as idealists building a new society that was in the best interests of a suffering humanity, an outlook that justified ruthlessness. Their dedication to the triumph of Communism overcame all doubts caused by the sight of starving people and the sounds of wailing women and children.

Defeated but unwilling to surrender their livestock, the peasants slaughtered their animals, gorging themselves in drunken orgies against the days of inevitable famine. The country's cattle herds declined by one-half, inflicting irreparable secondary losses as well. The number of horses, crucial for rural transport and farm work, fell by one-third. Crops were not planted or not harvested, the Five-Year Plan was disrupted, and from 1931 to 1933 millions starved to death.



David King Collection, London, England.

FORCED LABOR IN THE GULAG. All those accused of disloyalty to the party and not killed outright ended up in one of the gulags, or forced-labor camps. Forced labor was designed as a punishment and also as a means of obtaining raw materials from inhospitable regions in the far north. In this photo, deported peasants and political prisoners using primitive technology are engaged in constructing the canal linking Leningrad with the White Sea. Millions perished in the gulags.

The suffering was most cruel in the Ukraine, where famine killed three million people—the earlier figure of six million is now rejected—many after extreme abuse and persecution. In order to buy industrial equipment abroad so that industrialization could proceed on target, the Soviet Union had to export food, as much of it as possible and for prices disastrously lowered by the Great Depression. Let the peasants in the Ukrainian breadbasket starve so that the country could grow strong! Moreover, Stalin relished the opportunity to punish the Ukrainians for their disloyalty during the civil war and their resistance to collectivization.

By 1935, practically all farming in Russia was collectivized. The kulaks had been wiped out as a class, and the peasants grumbled about the rise of a new serfdom.

Stalin had hoped to create technically efficient “factory farms” that would provide inexpensive food for the massive industrial labor force. But in reality, collectivization stifled agricultural production. Enraged peasants had slaughtered livestock rather than turn it over to the state; mismanagement and unenthusiastic collective farmers resulted in a precipitous decline in agricultural production. For decades collective farming failed

to achieve the levels of production previously reached in the 1920s.

Total Control

To quash resistance and mold a new type of suitably motivated and disciplined citizen, Stalin unleashed a third revolution, the revolution of totalitarianism. Only Communist regimentation and monolithic control by the party over state and society, he believed, could liberate Russia from its historic inferiority. Moreover, the totalitarian state accorded with his desire to exercise total control over the party and the nation. Stalin's totalitarianism aimed at a complete reconstruction of state and society, down to the innermost recesses of human consciousness. It called for a "new man" suited to the needs of Soviet industrialism.

The revolution of totalitarianism encompassed all cultural activity. Religion, which offered an alternative worldview, came under attack. Priests were jailed, organized worship discouraged, and churches converted into barns. All media of communication—literature, the arts, music, the stage—were forced into subservience to the Five-Year Plan and Soviet ideology. In literature, as in all other art, an official style was promulgated. Called *socialist realism*, it was expected to describe the world as the party saw it or hoped to shape it. Novels in the social realist manner told how the romances of tractor drivers and milkmaids or of lathe operators and office secretaries led to new victories of production under the Five-Year Plan. Composers found their music examined for remnants of bourgeois spirit; they were to write simple tunes suitable for heroic times. Everywhere huge, high-color posters showed men and women hard at work with radiant faces, calling others to join them; often Stalin, the wise father and leader, was shown among them. In this way, artistic creativity was locked into a dull, utilitarian straitjacket of official cheerfulness; creativity was allowed only to boost industrial productivity. Behind the scenes, all artists were disciplined to conform to the will of the party or be crushed.

Education, from nursery school to university, was likewise harnessed to train dutiful and loyal citizens, and Soviet propaganda made a cult of

Stalin that bordered on deification. Thus, a writer declared in 1935:

Centuries will pass and the generations still to come will regard us as the happiest of mortals, as the most fortunate of men, because we . . . were privileged to see Stalin, our inspired leader. Yes, and we regard ourselves as the happiest of mortals because we are the contemporaries of a man who never had an equal in world history. The men of all ages will call on thy name, which is strong, beautiful, wise, and marvellous. Thy name is engraven on every factory, every machine, every place on the earth, and in the hearts of all men.⁷

Stalin unleashed raw terror to break stubborn wills and compel conformity. Terror had been used as a tool of government ever since the Bolshevik Revolution (and the tsars had also used it, intermittently). After the start of the first Five-Year Plan, show trials were staged that denounced as saboteurs the engineers who disagreed with Stalin's production timetable. The terror used to herd the peasants onto collective farms was even greater. Stalin also used terror to crush opposition and to instill an abject fear both in the ranks of the party and in Russian society at large.

Purges had long been used to rid the party of weaklings. After 1934, however, they became an instrument of Stalin's drive for unchallenged personal power. Stalin's paranoia led him to see enemies and threats to his rule everywhere. In 1936, his vindictive terror broke into the open. The first batch of victims, including many founders of the Communist Party, were accused of conspiring with the exiled Trotsky to set up a "terrorist center" and of scheming to terrorize the party. After being sentenced to death, they were immediately executed. In 1937, the next group, including prominent Communists of Lenin's day, were charged with cooperating with foreign intelligence agencies and wrecking "socialist reconstruction," the term for Stalin's revolution; they too were executed. Shortly afterward, a secret purge decimated the military high command—for which the country paid a heavy price when Germany attacked in 1941. Almost half the country's seventy thousand officers were either shot or sent

to the camps—after the Nazi invasion many of these prisoners were rehabilitated and restored to active duty.

In 1938, the last and biggest show trial advanced the most bizarre accusation of all: sabotage, espionage, and attempting to dismember the Soviet Union and kill all its leaders (including Lenin in 1918). In the public hearings, some defendants refuted the public prosecutor, but in the end all confessed, usually after torture and threats to their family, before being executed. Western observers were aghast at the cynical charges and at the physical and mental tortures used to obtain the confessions. Under Stalin, the revolution was devouring its own children at a rate that far surpassed earlier revolutions.

The great trials, however, involved only a small minority of Stalin's victims; many more perished in silence without the benefit of legal proceedings. The terror first hit members of the party, especially the Old Bolsheviks, who had joined before the Revolution; they were the most independent-minded members and therefore the most dangerous to Stalin. But Stalin also diminished the cultural elite that had survived the Lenin revolution. Thousands of engineers, scientists, industrial managers, scholars, and artists disappeared; accused of counterrevolutionary crimes, they were shot or sent to forced-labor camps, where many perished. No one was safe. To frighten the common people in all walks of life, men, women, and even children were dragged into the net of Stalin's secret police, leaving the survivors with a soul-killing reminder: submit or else. "In the years of the terror," recalled one victim, "there was not a house in the country where people did not sit trembling at night."⁸

The forced-labor camps to which Stalin's victims were deported played an important role in the Soviet economy. Slave labor constructed the White Sea–Baltic Canal, which the regime held up as a monument of Communist achievement. Mining, logging, and construction enterprises in remote parts of the country also depended on forced labor. It is estimated that from 1929 to the death of Stalin in 1953, some 18 million people were confined to the Gulag, as Stalin's system of concentration camps came to be known. Many perished from abuse, starvation, and bone-crushing labor in freezing weather. As in Nazi concentration camps, administrators and guards deliberately dehumanized and brutalized the prisoners,

whom the regime designated as "filth" and "enemies of the people."

Stalin may have orchestrated the terror, but large numbers of party members believed that terror, which was decimating their own ranks, was necessary. The memory of the vicious civil war, when domestic and foreign enemies sought to overthrow the new Bolshevik regime, and the resistance of the kulaks to collectivization created a siege mentality among the Communist leadership. Everywhere they saw anti-Soviets plotting against the party; they defined these enemies as Trotskyites, former kulaks, Whites who had fought in the civil war, members of outlawed anti-Soviet political parties, foreign agents, criminals, cattle and horse thieves, contraband smugglers, bandits, and so on. Party officials saw terror as a legitimate way both of protecting the party—to which they were ideologically committed and from which they derived prestige, power, and material benefits—and of protecting the Soviet experiment, which they viewed as humanity's best hope.

The toll of the purges is reckoned in many millions; it included Trotsky, who in 1940 was murdered in Mexico. The bloodletting was ghastly, as Stalin's purge officials themselves followed each other into death and ignominy.

Stalin was untroubled by the waste of life. He believed that without the total obedience of the Russian people, the Soviet economy could not be effectively and quickly mobilized, and that terror was necessary to compel compliance. In Stalin's mind, totalitarianism was necessary to save Russia from foreign enemies that would devour it. No doubt, the terror was also an expression of his craving for personal power and his vengeful and suspicious, some say clinically paranoid, nature. He saw enemies everywhere, took pleasure in selecting victims, and reveled in his omnipotence. By showing party officials and the Russian masses how vulnerable they were, how dependent they were on his will, Stalin frightened them into servility. For good reason, Stalin has been called a twentieth-century Ivan the Terrible. Like the sixteenth-century tsar, for whom he expressed admiration, Stalin stopped at no brutality to establish personal autocracy.

But more than a craving for personal power motivated Stalin. He regarded himself as Lenin's heir, responsible for securing and expanding the Revolution and defending it against foreign and

domestic enemies. The only way to do this was to create a powerful Soviet Union through rapid modernization.

THE NATURE AND APPEAL OF FASCISM

Liberals viewed the Great War as a conflict between freedom and autocracy and expected an Allied victory to accelerate the spread of democracy throughout Europe. Right after the war, it seemed that liberalism would continue to advance as it had in the nineteenth century. The collapse of the autocratic German and Austrian Empires had led to the formation of parliamentary governments throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Yet within two decades, in an extraordinary turn of events, democracy seemed in its death throes. In Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Germany, and in all the newly created states of Central and Eastern Europe except Czechoslovakia, democracy collapsed, and various forms of authoritarian government emerged. The defeat of democracy and the surge of authoritarianism was best exemplified by the triumph of Fascist movements in Italy and Germany.

The emergence of Fascist movements in more than twenty European lands after World War I was a sign that liberal society was in a state of disorientation and dissolution. The cultural pessimism, disdain for reason, elitism, romantic glorification of action and heroism, and contempt for liberal values voiced by many intellectuals and nationalists before the war found expression after the war in the antidemocratic and irrational Fascist ideologies which altered European political life. Fascism marked the culmination of the dangerous trends inherent in the extreme nationalism and radical conservatism of the late nineteenth century and in the repudiation of modern Western civilization by disenchanted intellectuals.

As a Europe-wide phenomenon, Fascism was a response to a postwar society afflicted with spiritual disintegration, economic dislocation, political instability, and thwarted nationalist hopes. A general breakdown of meaning and values led people to search for new beliefs and new political arrangements. Fascism was an expression of fear that the Bolshevik Revolution would spread

westward. It was also an expression of hostility to democratic values and a reaction to the failure of liberal institutions to solve the problems of modern industrial society; with brutal frankness, Fascist leaders proclaimed that individual freedom, a relic of a dying liberal age and a barrier to national greatness, would be dispensed with. Anything seemed better than the ineffectual parliaments that appeared helpless in the face of mounting misery. Moreover, in many European lands, democracy had shallow roots. Having little familiarity with or appreciation of the procedures and values of constitutional government, people were susceptible to antidemocratic ideologies and demagogues.

Fascist movements were marked by a determination to eradicate liberalism and Marxism—to undo the legacy of the French Revolution of 1789 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Fascists believed that theirs was a spiritual revolution, that they were initiating a new era in history and building a new civilization on the ruins of liberal democracy. “We stand for a new principle in the world,” said Mussolini. “We stand for the sheer, categorical, definitive antithesis to the world of democracy . . . to the world which still abides by the fundamental principles laid down in 1789.”⁹ The chief principle of Nazism, said Hitler, “is to abolish the liberal concept of the individual and the Marxist concept of humanity, and to substitute for them the Volk community, rooted in the soil and united by the bond of its common blood.”¹⁰ The Fascists’ uniforms, songs, flags, parades, mass rallies, and cult of physical strength and violence all symbolized this call for a reawakened and reunited people.

Fascists accused liberal society of despiritualizing human beings and transforming them into materialistic creatures whose highest ideal was moneymaking. Regarding liberalism as bankrupt and parliamentary government as futile, many people yearned for an authoritarian government led by military men and nationalists. To Fascists and their sympathizers, democracy seemed an ineffective and enfeebled old order ready to be overthrown. Idealistic youth and intellectuals rejoiced in Fascist activism. They saw Fascism as a revolt against the mediocrity of the liberal state and modern mass society and a reaffirmation of the noblest human qualities: heroism and dedication to one’s people. Fascists saw themselves as

participants in a dynamic mass movement that would rectify the weaknesses and irresolution of parliamentary government and rid the nation of corrosive foreign influences. For them, the triumph of Fascism would mark a new beginning for their nation and a new era in world history.

The Fascist vision of a regenerated nation—a new order led by a determined and heroic elite—arising from the ruins of a decadent old order had the appeal of great myth; it evoked belief, commitment, and loyalty. The myth of rebirth—a nation cured of evil and building a new and vigorous society—had a profound impact on people dissatisfied with liberal society and searching for new beliefs. The myth of the nation reborn answered a metaphysical yearning to give meaning to life and history. It provided an emotionally gratifying worldview at a time when many people had lost their confidence in liberal-democratic ideals and institutions.

Fascists regarded Marxism as another enemy, for class conflict divided and weakened the state. To Fascists, the Marxist call for workers of the world to unite meant the death of the national community. Fascism, in contrast, would reintegrate the proletariat into the nation and end class hostilities by making people at all levels feel that they were a needed part of the nation. Fascism thus offered a solution to the problem of insecurity and isolation in modern industrial society.

Attacking the rational tradition of the Enlightenment, Fascism exalted will, blood, feeling, and instinct. Intellectual discussion and critical analysis, said Fascists, cause national divisiveness; reason promotes doubt, enfeebles the will, and hinders instinctive, aggressive action. Fascism made a continual appeal to the emotions as a means of integrating the national community. This flow of emotion fueled irrational and dangerous desires, beliefs, and expectations that blocked critical judgment and responsible action. Glorifying action for its own sake, Fascists aroused and manipulated brutal and primitive impulses and carried into politics the combative spirit of the trenches. They formed private armies, which attracted veterans—many of them rootless, brutal, and maladjusted men who sought to preserve the loyalty, camaraderie, and violence of the front.

Fascists exalted the leader—who, according to the Fascist view, intuitively grasped what was best for the nation—and called for rule by an elite of

dedicated party members. The leader and the party would relieve the individual of the need to make decisions. Convinced that the liberal stress on individual freedom promoted national divisiveness, Fascists pressed for monolithic unity: one leader, one party, one ideology, and one national will.

Fascism drew its mass support from the lower middle class: small merchants, artisans, white-collar workers, civil servants, and peasants of moderate means, all of whom were frightened both by big capitalism and by Marxism. They hoped that Fascism would protect them from the competition of big business and prevent the hated working class from establishing a Marxist state, which would threaten their property. The lower middle class saw in Fascism a non-Communist way of overcoming economic crises and restoring traditional respect for family, native soil, and nation. Furthermore, many of these people saw Fascism as a way of attacking the existing social order, which denied them opportunities for economic advancement and social prestige.

Although a radicalized middle class gave Fascist movements their mass support, the Fascists could not have captured the state without the aid of existing ruling elites: landed aristocrats, industrialists, and army leaders. In Russia, the Bolsheviks had to fight their way to power; in Italy and Germany, the old ruling order virtually handed power to the Fascists. In both countries, Fascist leaders succeeded in reassuring the conservative elite that they would not institute widespread social reforms or interfere with private property and would protect the nation from Communism. Even though the old elite abhorred Fascist violence and demagoguery, it entered into an alliance with the Fascists to protect its interests.

In their struggle to bring down the liberal state, Fascist leaders aroused primitive impulses and tribal loyalties; they made use of myths and rituals to mobilize and manipulate the masses. Organizing their propaganda campaigns with the rigor of a military operation, Fascists stirred and dominated the masses and confused and undermined their democratic opposition, breaking its will to resist. Fascists were most successful in countries with weak democratic traditions. When parliamentary government faltered, it had few staunch defenders, and many people were drawn to charismatic demagogues who promised direct action.

The proliferation of Fascist movements demonstrated that the habits of democracy are not quickly learned, easily retained, or even desired. Particularly during times of crisis, people lose patience with parliamentary discussion and constitutional procedures, sink into nonrational modes of thought and behavior, and are easily manipulated by unscrupulous politicians. For the sake of economic or emotional security and national grandeur, they will often willingly sacrifice political freedom. Fascism starkly manifested the immense power of the irrational; it humbled liberals, making them permanently aware of the limitations of reason and the fragility of freedom.

The Fascist goal of maximum centralization of power was furthered by developments during World War I: the expansion of bureaucracy, the concentration of industry into giant monopolies, and the close cooperation between industry and the state. The instruments of modern technology—radio, motion pictures, public address systems, telephone, and teletype—made it possible for the state to indoctrinate, manipulate, and dominate its subjects.

THE RISE OF FASCISM IN ITALY

Postwar Unrest

Although Italy had been on the winning side in World War I, the country resembled a defeated nation. Food shortages, rising prices, massive unemployment, violent strikes, workers occupying factories, and peasants squatting on the uncultivated periphery of large estates created a climate of crisis. Italy required effective leadership and a reform program, but party disputes paralyzed the liberal government. With several competing parties, the liberals could not organize a solid majority that could cope with the domestic crisis.

The middle class was severely stressed. To meet its accelerating expenses, the government had increased taxes, but the burden fell unevenly on small landowners, owners of small businesses, civil service workers, and professionals. Large landowners and industrialists feared that their nation was on the verge of a Bolshevik-style revolution. In truth, Italian socialists had no master plan to seize power. Peasant squatters and urban strikers were responding to the distress in their own regions and did not

significantly coordinate their efforts with those in other localities. Besides, when workers realized that they could not keep the factories operating, their revolutionary zeal waned and they started to abandon the plants. The workers' and peasants' poorly led and futile struggles did not portend a Red revolution. Nevertheless, the industrialists and landlords, with the Bolshevik Revolution still vivid in their minds, were taking no chances.

Adding to the unrest was national outrage at the terms of the World War I peace settlement. Italians felt that despite their sacrifices—five hundred thousand dead and one million wounded—they had been robbed of the fruits of victory. Italy had been denied the Dalmatian coast, the Adriatic port of Fiume, and territory in Africa and the Middle East. Nationalists blamed the liberal government for what they called a “mutilated victory.” In 1919, a force of war veterans, led by the poet and adventurer Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863–1938), seized Fiume, to the delirious joy of Italian nationalists and the embarrassment of the government. D’Annunzio’s occupation of the port lasted more than a year, adding fuel to the flames of Italian nationalism and demonstrating the weakness of the liberal regime in imposing its authority on rightist opponents.

Mussolini’s Seizure of Power

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), a former socialist and World War I veteran, exploited the unrest in postwar Italy in order to capture control of the state. In 1919, he organized the Fascist Party, which attracted converts from among the discontented, the disillusioned, and the uprooted. Many Italians viewed Mussolini as the leader who would gain Fiume, Dalmatia, and colonies and win for Italy its rightful place of honor in international affairs. Hardened battle veterans joined the Fascist movement to escape the boredom and idleness of civilian life. They welcomed the opportunity to wear the uniforms of the Fascist militia (called the Black Shirts), parade in the streets, and fight socialist and labor union opponents. Squads of the Black Shirts (*squadristi*) raided socialist and trade union offices, destroying property and beating the occupants. As socialist Red Shirts responded in kind, Italy soon appeared to be drifting toward civil war.



AP/Wide World Photos

MUSSOLINI WITH HIS TROOPS. The Italian dictator deliberately tried to sustain an image of a virile warrior. Although Mussolini established a one-party state, he was less successful than Hitler or Stalin in creating a totalitarian regime.

Hoping that Mussolini would rescue Italy from Bolshevism, industrialists and landowners contributed large sums to the Fascist Party. The lower middle class, fearful that the growing power of labor unions and the Socialist Party threatened their property and social prestige, viewed Mussolini as a protector. Middle-class university students, searching for adventure and an ideal, and army officers, dreaming of an Italian empire and hostile to parliamentary government, were also attracted to Mussolini's party. Mussolini's philosophy of action intrigued intellectuals disenchanted with liberal politics and parliamentary democracy. His nationalism, activism, and anti-Communism gradually seduced elements of the power structure: capitalists, aristocrats, army officers, the royal family, and the church. Regarding liberalism as bankrupt and

parliamentary government as futile, many of these people yearned for a military dictatorship.

In 1922, Mussolini made his bid for power. Speaking at a giant rally of his followers in late October, he declared: "Either they will give us the government or we shall take it by descending on Rome. It is now a matter of days, perhaps hours." A few days later, the Fascists began their march on Rome. It would have been a relatively simple matter to crush the twenty thousand Fascist marchers, who were armed with little more than pistols and rifles, but King Victor Emmanuel III (1869–1947) refused to act. The king's advisers, some of them sympathetic to Mussolini, exaggerated the strength of the Fascists. Believing that he was rescuing Italy from terrible violence, the king appointed Mussolini prime minister.

Mussolini had bluffed his way to power. Fascism had triumphed not because of its own strength—the Fascist Party had only 35 of 535 seats in parliament—but because the liberal government, indecisive and fearful of violence, did not counter force with force. In the past, the liberal state had not challenged Fascist acts of terror; now it feebly surrendered to Fascist blustering and threats. No doubt liberals hoped that, once in power, the Fascists would forsake terror, pursue moderate aims, and act within the constitution. But the liberals were wrong; they had completely misjudged Fascism's antidemocratic character.

The Fascist State in Italy

Gradually, Mussolini moved toward establishing a dictatorship. In 1925 and 1926 he eliminated non-Fascists from his cabinet, dissolved opposition parties, smashed the independent trade unions, suppressed opposition newspapers, replaced local mayors with Fascist officials, and organized a secret police to round up troublemakers. Many anti-Fascists fled the country or were deported.

Mussolini was less successful than Hitler and Stalin in fashioning a totalitarian state. The industrialists, the large landowners, the church, and to some extent even the army never fell under the complete domination of the party. Nor did the regime possess the mind of its subjects with the same thoroughness as the Nazis did in Germany. Life in Italy was less regimented and the individual less fearful than in Nazi Germany or Communist Russia.

Like Communist Russia and Nazi Germany, however, Fascist Italy used mass organizations and mass media to control minds and regulate behavior. As in the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, the regime created a cult of the leader. “Mussolini goes forward with confidence, in a halo of myth, almost chosen by God, indefatigable and infallible, the instrument employed by Providence for the creation of a new civilization,” wrote the philosopher Giovanni Gentile.¹¹ To convey the image of a virile leader, Mussolini had himself photographed bare-chested or in a uniform and a steel helmet. Elementary school textbooks depicted him as the savior of the nation, a modern-day Julius Caesar.

Fascist propaganda urged that the grandeur of the Roman Empire be restored through conquest. It also inculcated habits of discipline and obedience: “Mussolini is always right.” “Believe! Obey! Fight!” Propaganda also glorified war: “A minute on the battlefield is worth a lifetime of peace.” The press, radio, and cinema idealized life under Fascism, implying that Fascism had eradicated crime, poverty, and social tensions. Schoolteachers and university professors were compelled to swear allegiance to the Fascist government and to propagate Fascist ideals, while students were urged to criticize instructors who harbored liberal attitudes. Millions of youths belonged to Fascist organizations, in which they participated in patriotic ceremonies and social functions, sang Fascist hymns, and wore Fascist uniforms. They submerged their own identities in the group.

Denouncing economic liberalism for promoting individual self-interest, Fascists also attacked socialism for instigating conflicts between workers and capitalists, which divided and weakened the nation. The Fascist way of resolving tensions between workers and employers was to abolish independent labor unions, prohibit strikes, and establish associations or corporations that included both workers and employers within a given industry. In theory, representatives of labor and capital would cooperatively solve their particular industry’s labor problems; in practice, however, the representatives of labor turned out to be Fascists who protected the interests of the industrialists. Although the Fascists lauded the cooperative system as a creative approach to modern economic problems, in reality it played a minor role in Italian economic life. Big business continued to make its own decisions, paying scant attention to the corporations.

Nor did the Fascist government solve Italy’s longstanding economic problems. To curtail the export of capital and to reduce the nation’s dependence on imports in case of war, Mussolini sought to make Italy self-sufficient. To win the “battle of grain,” the Fascist regime brought marginal lands under cultivation and urged farmers to concentrate on wheat rather than other crops. While wheat production increased substantially, total agricultural output fell because wheat had been planted on land more suited to animal husbandry and fruit cultivation. To make Italy industrially self-sufficient, the regime limited imports of foreign goods, with the result that Italian consumers paid higher prices for goods manufactured in Italy. Mussolini posed as the protector of the little people, but under his regime the power and profits of big business grew and the standard of living of small farmers and urban workers slipped.

Although anticlerical since his youth, Mussolini was also expedient. He recognized that coming to terms with the church would improve his image with Catholic public opinion. The Vatican regarded Mussolini’s regime as a barrier against atheistic Communism and as less hostile to church interests and more amenable to church direction than a liberal government. Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) was an ultraconservative whose hatred of liberalism and secularism led him to believe that the Fascists would increase the influence of the church in the nation.

In 1929, the Lateran Accords recognized the independence of Vatican City, repealed many of the anticlerical laws passed under the liberal government, and made religious instruction compulsory in all secondary schools. Relations between the Vatican and the Fascist government remained fairly good throughout the decade of the 1930s. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and intervened in the Spanish Civil War, the church supported him. Although the papacy criticized Mussolini for drawing closer to Hitler and introducing anti-Jewish legislation, it never broke with the Fascist regime.

THE NEW GERMAN REPUBLIC

In the last days of World War I, a revolution brought down the German government, a semi-authoritarian monarchy, and led to the creation of a democratic republic. The new government,



Roger-Viollet.

THE SPELLBINDER. Hitler was a superb orator who knew how to reach the hearts of his listeners. The masses, he said, are aroused by the spoken, not the written, word.

headed by Chancellor Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925), a Social Democrat, signed the armistice agreement ending the war. Many Germans blamed the creators of the new democratic leadership for the defeat—a baseless accusation, for the German generals, knowing that the war was lost, had sought an armistice. In February 1919, the recently elected National Assembly met at Weimar and proceeded to draw up a constitution for the new state. The Weimar Republic—born in revolution, which most Germans detested, and military defeat, which many attributed to the new government—faced an uncertain future. The legend that traitors, principally Jews and Social Democrats, cheated Germany of victory was created and propagated by the conservative right—generals, high-ranking bureaucrats, university

professors, and nationalists, who wanted to preserve the army's reputation and bring down the new and hated democratic Weimar Republic.

Threats from Left and Right

Dominated by moderate socialists, the infant republic faced internal threats from both the radical left and the radical right. In January 1919, the newly established German Communist party, or Spartacists, disregarding the advice of their leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, took to the streets of Berlin and declared Ebert's government deposed. To crush the revolution, Ebert turned to the Free Corps: volunteer brigades of ex-soldiers and adventurers led by officers loyal to the emperor, who had been fighting to protect the eastern borders from encroachments by the new states of Poland, Estonia, and Latvia. The men of the Free Corps relished action and despised Bolshevism and many of them would later become prominent in Hitler's party. They suppressed the revolution and murdered Luxemburg and Liebknecht on January 15.

The Spartacist revolt and the short-lived “soviet” republic in Munich (and others in Baden and Brunswick) had a profound effect on the German psyche. The Communists had been easily subdued, but fear of a Communist insurrection remained deeply embedded in the middle and upper classes—a fear that drove many of their members into the ranks of the Weimar Republic's right-wing opponents.

Refusing to disband as the government ordered, in March 1920 the right-wing Free Corps marched into Berlin and declared a new government, headed by Wolfgang Kapp, a staunch German nationalist. Insisting that it could not fire on fellow soldiers, the German army, the *Reichswehr*, made no move to defend the republic. A general strike called by the labor unions prevented Kapp from governing, and the coup collapsed. However, the Kapp Putsch demonstrated that the loyalty of the army to the republic was doubtful and that important segments of German society supported the overthrow, by violence if necessary, of the Weimar Republic and its replacement by an authoritarian government driven by a nationalist credo.

Economic Crisis

In addition to uprisings by the left and right, the republic was burdened by economic crisis. Unable to meet the deficit in the national budget, the government simply printed more money, causing the value of the German mark to decline precipitously. In 1919, the mark stood at 8.9 to the dollar; in November 1923, a dollar could be exchanged for 4 billion marks. Bank savings, war bonds, and pensions, representing years of toil and thrift, became worthless. Blaming the government for this disaster, the ruined middle class became more receptive to ultrarightist movements that aimed to bring down the republic.

A critical factor in the collapse of the German economy was the French occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923. With the economy in shambles, the republic had defaulted on reparation payments. The French premier, Raymond Poincaré (1860–1934), ordered French troops into the Ruhr—the nerve center of German industry. Responding to the republic’s call for passive resistance, factory workers, miners, and railway workers in the Ruhr refused to work for the French. Paying salaries to striking workers and officials contributed to the mark’s free fall.

Gustav Stresemann, who became chancellor in August 1923, skillfully placed the republic on the path to recovery. He declared Germany’s willingness to make reparation payments and issued a new currency, backed by a mortgage on German real estate. To protect the value of the new currency, the government did not print another issue. Inflation receded, and confidence was restored.

A new arrangement regarding reparations also contributed to the economic recovery. In 1924, the parties accepted the Dawes Plan, which reduced reparations and based them on Germany’s economic capacity. During the negotiations, France agreed to withdraw its troops from the Ruhr—another step toward easing tensions for the republic.

From 1924 to 1929, economic conditions improved. Foreign capitalists, particularly Americans, were attracted by high interest rates and the low cost of labor. Their investments in German businesses stimulated the economy. By 1929, iron, steel, coal, and chemical production exceeded prewar levels. The value of German exports also

surpassed that of 1913. Real wages were higher than before the war, and improved unemployment benefits also made life better for the workers. It appeared that Germany had achieved political stability, as threats from the extremist parties of the left and the right subsided. Given time and continued economic stability, democracy might have taken firmer root in Germany. But then came the Great Depression. The global economic crisis that began in October 1929 starkly revealed how weak the Weimar Republic was.

Fundamental Weaknesses of the Weimar Republic

German political experience provided poor soil for transplanting an English democratic parliamentary system. Before World War I, Germany had been a semiautocratic state, ruled by an emperor who commanded the armed forces, controlled foreign policy, appointed the chancellor, and called and dismissed parliament. This authoritarian system blocked the German people from acquiring democratic habits and attitudes; still accustomed to rule from above, still adoring the power-state, many Germans sought to destroy the democratic Weimar Republic.

Traditional conservatives—the upper echelons of the civil service, judges, industrialists, large landowners, and army leaders—scorned democracy and hated the republic. They regarded the revolution against the monarchy in the last weeks of the war as a treacherous act and the establishment of a democratic republic as a violation of Germany’s revered tradition of hierarchical leadership. Nor did the middle class feel a commitment to the liberal-democratic principles on which the republic rested. The traditionally nationalistic middle class identified the republic with the defeat in war and the humiliation of the Versailles treaty. Rabidly antisocialist, this class saw the leaders of the republic as Marxists who would impose on Germany a working-class state. Right-wing intellectuals often attacked democracy as a barrier to the true unity of the German nation. In the tradition of nineteenth-century Volkish thinkers, they disdained reason and political freedom, glorifying instead race, instincts, and action. By doing so, they turned many Germans against the republic, eroding the popular support on which democracy depends.

The Weimar Republic also showed the weaknesses of the multiparty system. With the vote spread over a number of parties, no one party held a majority of seats in the parliament (Reichstag), so the republic was governed by a coalition of several parties. But because of ideological differences, the coalition was always unstable and in danger of failing to function. This is precisely what happened during the Great Depression. When effective leadership was imperative, the government could not act. Political deadlock caused Germans to lose what little confidence they had in the democratic system. Support for the parties that wanted to preserve democracy dwindled, and extremist parties that aimed to topple the republic gained strength. Seeking to bring down the republic were the Communists on the left and two rightist parties—the Nationalists and the National Socialist German Workers' Party, led by Adolf Hitler.

THE RISE OF HITLER

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was born in Austria on April 20, 1889, the fourth child of a minor civil servant. A poor student in secondary school, although by no means unintelligent, Hitler left high school and lived idly for more than two years. In 1907 and again in 1908, the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts rejected his application for admission. Hitler did not try to learn a trade or to work steadily but earned some money by painting picture postcards. He read a lot, especially in art, history, and military affairs. He also read the racist, nationalist, anti-Semitic, and Pan-German literature that abounded in multinational Vienna. The racist treatises preached the danger posed by mixing races, called for the liquidation of racial inferiors, and marked the Jew as the embodiment of evil and the source of all misfortune.

In Vienna, Hitler came into contact with Georg von Schönerer's Pan-German movement. For Schönerer, the Jews were evil not because of their religion or because they rejected Christ but because they possessed evil racial qualities. Schönerer's followers wore watch chains with pictures of hanged Jews attached. Hitler was particularly impressed with Karl Lueger, the mayor of Vienna, a clever demagogue who skillfully manipulated the anti-Semitic feelings of the Catholic Viennese for

his own political advantage. In Vienna, Hitler also acquired a hatred for Marxism and democracy and grew convinced that the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest were the essential facts of the social world.

When World War I began, Hitler was in Munich. He welcomed the war as a relief from his daily life, which lacked purpose and excitement. "Overpowered by stormy enthusiasm," he later declared, "I fell down on my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being permitted to live at this time."¹² Volunteering for the German army, Hitler found battle exhilarating and twice received the Iron Cross for serving as a runner. The experience of battle taught Hitler to prize discipline, regimentation, leadership, authority, struggle, and ruthlessness—values that he carried with him into the politics of the postwar world.

The shock of Germany's defeat and revolution intensified Hitler's commitment to racial nationalism. To lead Germany to total victory over its racial enemies became his obsession. Germany's defeat and shame, he said, were due to the creators of the republic, the "November criminals," and behind them was a Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy.

The Nazi Party

In 1919, Hitler joined a small right-wing extremist group. Displaying fantastic energy and extraordinary ability as a demagogic orator, propagandist, and organizer, Hitler quickly became the leader of the party, whose name was changed to National Socialist German Workers' Party (commonly called the Nazi Party). As leader, Hitler insisted on absolute authority and total allegiance—a demand that coincided with the postwar longing for a strong leader who would set right a shattered nation.

Like Mussolini, Hitler incorporated military attitudes and techniques into politics. Uniforms, salutes, emblems, flags, and other symbols imbued party members with a sense of solidarity and camaraderie. At mass meetings, Hitler was a spellbinder who gave stunning performances. His pounding fists, throbbing body, wild gesticulations, hypnotic eyes, rage-swollen face, and repeated, frenzied denunciations of the Versailles

treaty, Marxism, the republic, and Jews inflamed and mesmerized the audience. Hitler instinctively grasped the innermost feelings of his audience, their resentments and longings. “The intense will of the man, the passion of his sincerity seemed to flow from him into me. I experienced an exaltation that could be likened only to religious conversion,” said one early admirer.¹³

In November 1923, Hitler tried to seize power in Munich, in the state of Bavaria, as a prelude to toppling the republic. The attempt, which came to be known as the Beer Hall Putsch, failed miserably. Ironically, however, Hitler’s prestige increased, for when he was put on trial he used it as an opportunity to denounce the republic and the Versailles treaty and to proclaim his philosophy of racial nationalism. His impassioned speeches, publicized by the press and received favorably by a judge sympathetic to right-wing nationalism, earned Hitler a nationwide reputation and a light sentence: five years’ imprisonment with the promise of quick parole. While in prison, Hitler dictated *Mein Kampf*, a rambling and turgid work that contained the essence of his worldview. The unsuccessful Munich Putsch taught Hitler a valuable lesson: armed insurrection against superior might fails. He would gain power not by force but by exploiting the instruments of democracy—elections and party politics. He would use apparently legal means to destroy the Weimar Republic and impose a dictatorship.

Hitler’s Worldview

Racial Nationalism Hitler’s thought comprised a patchwork of nineteenth-century anti-Semitic, Volkish, Social Darwinist, antidemocratic, and anti-Marxist ideas. From these ideas, many of which enjoyed wide popularity, Hitler constructed a worldview rooted in racial myths and fantasies. Nazism rejected both the Judeo-Christian and the Enlightenment traditions and sought to found a new world order based on racial nationalism. For Hitler, race was the key to understanding world history. He believed that a reawakened, racially united Germany led by men of iron will would carve out a vast European empire and would deal a decadent liberal civilization its deathblow. It would conquer Russia, eradicate Communism,

and reduce to serfdom the subhuman Slavs, “a mass of born slaves who feel the need of a master.”¹⁴

In the tradition of crude Volkish nationalists and Social Darwinists, Hitler divided the world into superior and inferior races and pitted them against each other in a struggle for survival. For him, this fight for life was a law of nature and of history.

The Jew as Devil An obsessive and virulent hatred of Jews dominated Hitler’s mental outlook. In waging war against the Jews, Hitler believed that he was defending Germany from its worst enemy, a sinister force that stood in total opposition to the new world he envisioned. In his mythical interpretation of the world, the Aryan was the originator and carrier of civilization. As descendants of the Aryans, the German race embodied creativity, bravery, and loyalty. As the opposite of the Aryan, the Jews, who belonged to a separate biological race, personified the vilest qualities. “Two worlds face one another,” said Hitler, “the men of God and the men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god. He must have come from another root of the human race. I set the Aryan and the Jew over and against each other.”¹⁵ Everything Hitler despised—liberalism, intellectualism, pacifism, parliamentarianism, internationalism, Marxism, modern art, and individualism—he attributed to Jews.

Hitler’s anti-Semitism served a functional purpose as well. By concentrating all evil in one enemy, “the conspirator and demonic” Jew, Hitler provided true believers with a simple, all-embracing, and emotionally satisfying explanation for their misery. By defining themselves as the racial and spiritual opposites of Jews, Germans of all classes felt joined together in a Volkish union.

The surrender to myth served to disorient the German intellect and to unify the nation. When the mind accepts an image such as Hitler’s image of Jews as vermin, germs, and satanic conspirators, it has lost all sense of balance and objectivity. Such a disoriented mind is ready to believe and to obey, to be manipulated and led, to brutalize and to tolerate brutality. It is ready to be absorbed into the will of the collective community. That many people, including intellectuals and members of the elite, accepted these racial ideas shows the enduring power of mythical thinking and the vulnerability of

reason. In 1933, the year Hitler took power, Felix Goldmann, a German-Jewish writer, commented astutely on the irrational character of Nazi anti-Semitism: “The present-day politicized racial anti-Semitism is the embodiment of myth, . . . nothing is discussed . . . only felt, . . . nothing is pondered critically, logically or reasonably, . . . only inwardly perceived, surmised. . . . We are apparently the last [heirs] of the Enlightenment.”¹⁶

The Importance of Propaganda Hitler understood that in an age of political parties, universal suffrage, and a popular press—the legacies of the French and Industrial Revolutions—the successful leader must win the support of the masses. This could be achieved best with propaganda. To be effective, said Hitler, propaganda must be aimed principally at the emotions. The masses are not moved by scientific ideas or by objective and abstract knowledge but by primitive feelings, terror, force, and discipline. Propaganda must reduce everything to simple slogans incessantly repeated and must concentrate on one enemy. The masses are aroused by the spoken, not the written, word—by a storm of hot passion erupting from the speaker “which like hammer blows can open the gates to the heart of the people.”¹⁷

The most effective means of stirring the masses and strengthening them for the struggle ahead, Hitler had written in *Mein Kampf*, is the mass meeting. Surrounded by tens of thousands of people, individuals lose their sense of individuality and no longer see themselves as isolated. They become members of a community bound together by an esprit de corps reminiscent of the trenches during the Great War. Bombarded by the cheers of thousands of voices, by marching units, by banners, by explosive oratory, individuals become convinced of the truth of the party’s message and the irresistibility of the movement. Their intellects overwhelmed, their resistance lowered, they lose their previous beliefs and are carried along on a wave of enthusiasm. Their despair over the condition of their nation turns to hope, and they derive a sense of belonging and mission. They feel that they are participants in a mighty movement that is destined to regenerate the German nation and initiate a new historical age. “The man who enters such a meeting doubting and wavering leaves it inwardly reinforced; he has become a link to the community.”¹⁸

Hitler Gains Power

After serving only nine months of his sentence, Hitler left prison in December 1924. He continued to build his party and waited for a crisis that would rock the republic and make his movement a force in national politics. The Great Depression, which began in the United States at the end of 1929, provided that crisis. Desperate and demoralized people lined up in front of government unemployment offices. Street peddlers, beggars, and youth gangs proliferated; suicides increased, particularly among middle-class people shamed by their descent into poverty, idleness, and uselessness. As Germany’s economic plight worsened, the German people became more amenable to Hitler’s radicalism. His propaganda techniques worked. The Nazi Party went from 810,000 votes in 1928 to 6,400,000 in 1930, and its representation in the Reichstag soared from 12 to 107.

To the lower middle class, the Nazis promised effective leadership and a solution to the economic crisis. But Nazism was more than a class movement. It appealed to the discontented and disillusioned from all segments of the population: embittered veterans, romantic nationalists, idealistic intellectuals, industrialists and large landowners frightened by Communism and social democracy, rootless and resentful people who felt they had no place in the existing society, the unemployed, lovers of violence, and newly enfranchised youth yearning for a cause. And always there was the immense attraction of Hitler, who tirelessly worked his oratorical magic on increasingly enthusiastic crowds, confidently promising leadership and national rebirth. Many Germans were won over by his fanatical sincerity, his iron will, and his conviction that he was chosen by fate to rescue Germany.

In the election of July 31, 1932, the Nazis received 37.3 percent of the vote and won 230 seats—far more than any other party, but still not a majority. Franz von Papen, who had resigned from the chancellorship, persuaded the aging president, Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934), to appoint Hitler as chancellor. In this decision, Papen had the support of German industrialists and aristocratic landowners, who regarded Hitler as a useful instrument to fight Communism, block social reform, break the backs of organized labor, and rebuild the armament industry.

Never intending to rule within the spirit of the constitution, Hitler, who took office on January 30, 1933, quickly moved to assume dictatorial powers. In February 1933, a Dutch drifter with Communist leanings set a fire in the Reichstag. Hitler persuaded Hindenburg to sign an emergency decree suspending civil rights on the pretext that the state was threatened by internal subversion. The chancellor then used these emergency powers to arrest, without due process, Communist and Social Democratic deputies.

In the elections of March 1933, the German people elected 288 Nazi deputies in a Reichstag of 647 seats. With the support of 52 deputies of the Nationalist Party and in the absence of Communist deputies, who were under arrest, the Nazis now had a secure majority. Later that month, Hitler bullied the Reichstag into passing the Enabling Act, which permitted the chancellor to enact legislation independently of the Reichstag. With astonishing passivity, the political parties had allowed the Nazis to dismantle the government and make Hitler a dictator with unlimited power. Hitler had used the instruments of democracy to destroy the republic and create a totalitarian state.

NAZI GERMANY

The Nazis moved to subjugate all political and economic institutions and all culture to the will of the party. The party became the state and its teachings the soul of the German nation. There could be no separation between private life and politics and no rights of the individual that the state must respect. Ideology must pervade every phase of daily life, and all organizations must come under party control. For both Communists and Nazis, ideology was “a grand transcendent fiction [or] metamyth” that provided adherents with answers to the crucial questions of life and history.¹⁹ Joseph Goebbels (see the upcoming section “Shaping the ‘New Man’”) summed up this totalitarian goal as follows: “It is not enough to reconcile people more or less to our regime, to move them towards a position of neutrality towards us, we want rather to work on people until they are addicted to us.”²⁰ An anonymous Nazi

poet expressed the totalitarian credo in these words:

*We have captured all the positions
And on the heights we have planted
The banners of our revolution.
You had imagined that that was all that we
wanted
We want more
We want all
Your hearts are our goal
It is your souls we want.*²¹

The Leader-State

The Third Reich was organized as a leader-state, in which Hitler, the *führer* (leader), embodied and expressed the real will of the German people, commanded the supreme loyalty of the nation, and held omnipotent power. As a Nazi political theorist stated, “The authority of the Fuehrer is total and all embracing . . . it is subject to no checks or controls; it is circumscribed by no . . . individual rights; it is . . . overriding and unfettered.”²²

In June 1933, the Social Democratic Party was outlawed, and within a few weeks the other political parties simply disbanded on their own. In May 1933, the Nazis had seized the property of the trade unions, arrested the leaders, and ended collective bargaining and strikes. The newly established German Labor Front, an instrument of the party, became the official organization of the working class.

Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Nazis did not destroy the upper classes of the old regime. Hitler made no war against the industrialists. He wanted from them loyalty, obedience, and a war machine. German businessmen prospered but exercised no influence on political decisions. The profits of industry rose, and workers lauded the regime for ending the unemployment crisis through an extensive program of public works, the restoration of conscription, and rearmament.

Nazism conflicted with the core values of Christianity. “The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity,” said Hitler to intimates during World War II.²³ Because Nazism could tolerate no other faith alongside itself, the Nazis, recognizing that Christianity was a

Primary Source

Ernst Huber: “The Authority of the Führer Is . . . All-Inclusive and Unlimited”

In Verfassungsrecht des grossdeutschen Reiches (Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich), legal scholar Ernst Rudolf Huber (1903–1990) offered a classic explication of the basic principles of National Socialism. The following excerpts from that work describe the nature of Hitler’s political authority.

The Führer-Reich of the [German] people is founded on the recognition that the true will of the people cannot be disclosed through parliamentary votes and plebiscites but that the will of the people in its pure and uncorrupted form can only be expressed through the Führer. Thus a distinction must be drawn between the supposed will of the people in a parliamentary democracy, which merely reflects the conflict of the various social interests, and the true will of the people in the Führer-state, in which the collective will of the real political unit is manifested. . . .

It would be impossible for a law to be introduced and acted upon in the Reichstag which had not originated with the Führer or, at least, received his approval. The procedure is similar to that of the plebiscite: The lawgiving power does not rest in the Reichstag; it merely proclaims through its decision its agreement with the will of the Führer, who is the lawgiver of the German people.

The Führer unites in himself all the sovereign authority of the Reich; all public authority in the state as well as in the movement is derived from the authority of the Führer. We must speak not of the state’s authority but of the Führer’s authority if we wish to designate the character of the political authority within the Reich correctly. The state does not hold political authority as an impersonal unit but receives it from the Führer as the executor of the national will. The authority of the Führer is complete

and all-embracing; it unites in itself all the means of political direction; it extends into all fields of national life; it embraces the entire people, which is bound to the Führer in loyalty and obedience. The authority of the Führer is not limited by checks and controls, by special autonomous bodies or individual rights, but it is free and independent, all-inclusive and unlimited. It is not, however, self-seeking or arbitrary and its ties are within itself. It is derived from the people; that is, it is entrusted to the Führer by the people. It exists for the people and has its justification in the people; it is free of all outward ties because it is in its innermost nature firmly bound up with the fate, the welfare, the mission, and the honor of the people.

The following passage is from another Nazi theorist.

The people cannot as a rule announce its will by means of majority vote but only through its embodiment in one man, or in a few men. The principle of the *identity* of the ruler and those who are ruled, of the government and those who are governed has been very forcibly represented as the principle of democracy. But this identity. . . . becomes mechanistic and superficial if one seeks to establish it in the theory that the people are at once the governors and the governed. . . . A true organic identity is only possible when the great mass of the people recognizes its embodiment in one man and feels itself to be one nature with him.

Question for Analysis

1. Point out several ways that Ernst Huber’s views represent a rejection of Western liberalism.

Readings on Fascism and National Socialism, selected by members of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Colorado (Denver: Alan Swallow, n.d.), 74, 76–77.

rival claimant for the German soul, moved to repress the Protestant and Catholic churches. In the public schools, religious instruction was cut back and the syllabus was changed to omit the Jewish origins of Christianity. Christ was depicted not as a Jew, heir to the prophetic tradition of Hebrew monotheism, but as an Aryan hero. The Gestapo (secret state police) censored church newspapers, scrutinized sermons and church activities, forbade some clergymen to preach, dismissed the opponents of Nazism from theological schools, and arrested some clerical critics of the regime.

The clergy were well represented among the Germans who resisted Nazism; some were sent to concentration camps or were executed. But these courageous clergy were not representative of the German churches, which, as organized institutions, capitulated to and cooperated with the Nazi regime. Both the German Evangelical (Lutheran) and German Catholic churches demanded that their faithful render loyalty to Hitler; both turned a blind eye to Nazi persecution of Jews. Even before World War II and the implementation of genocide, many Evangelical churches banned baptized Jews from entering their temples and dismissed pastors with Jewish ancestry. Some clergy, reared in a traditional anti-Semitic theological environment, regarded Nazi measures as just punishment for those who had rejected Christ. During the war, both Catholic and Evangelical churches condemned resistance and found much in the Third Reich to admire, and both supported Hitler's war. The prominent Lutheran theologian who "welcomed that change that came to Germany in 1933 as a divine gift and miracle" voiced the sentiments of many members of the clergy.²⁴

The Nazis instituted many anti-Jewish measures designed to make outcasts of the Jews. Thousands of Jewish doctors, lawyers, musicians, artists, and professors were barred from practicing their professions, and Jewish members of the civil service were dismissed. A series of laws tightened the screws of humiliation and persecution. Marriage or sexual encounters between Germans and Jews were forbidden. Universities, schools, restaurants, pharmacies, hospitals, theaters, museums, and athletic fields were gradually closed to Jews. The propaganda machine, including the schools and media, conditioned Germans to see the Jew as an evil, alien, and dangerous parasite. The Nazis also expropriated Jewish

property, an act of thievery that benefited numerous individual Germans and business firms.

In November 1938, using as a pretext the assassination of a German official in Paris by a seventeen-year-old Jewish youth whose family the Nazis had mistreated, the Nazis organized an extensive pogrom. Nazi gangs murdered scores of Jews, destroyed 267 synagogues, and burned and vandalized 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses all over Germany—an event that became known as Night of the Broken Glass (*Kristallnacht*). Some thirty thousand Jews were thrown into concentration camps. The Reich then imposed on the Jewish community a fine of one billion marks. These measures were a mere prelude, however. During World War II, the genocidal murder of European Jewry became a cardinal Nazi objective. As a rule, German academic and clerical elites did not protest; indeed, many agreed with the National Socialists' edicts. The Jews were simply abandoned.

Shaping the "New Man"

The Ministry of Popular Enlightenment, headed by Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945), controlled the press, book publishing, the radio, the theater, and the cinema. Nazi propaganda sought to condition the mind to revere the führer and to obey the new regime. Its intent was to deprive individuals of their capacity for independent thought. By concentrating on the myth of race and the cult of the infallible führer—the German messiah sent by destiny to redeem the fatherland—Nazi propaganda tried to disorient the rational mind and to give the individual new standards to believe in and obey. Propaganda aimed to mold the entire nation to think and respond as the leader-state directed.

The regime made a special effort to reach young people. All youths between the ages of ten and eighteen were urged and then required to join the Hitler Youth, and all other youth organizations were dissolved. At camps and rallies, young people paraded, sang, saluted, and chanted: "We were slaves; we were outsiders in our own country. So were we before Hitler united us. Now we would fight against Hell itself for our leader."²⁵ The schools, long breeding grounds of nationalism, militarism, antiliberalism, and anti-Semitism, now indoctrinated the young in Nazi ideology.



UP/Bettman News Photos.

ADOLF HITLER BEFORE HIS LABOR ARMY AT NUREMBERG, GERMANY, SEPTEMBER 1938.

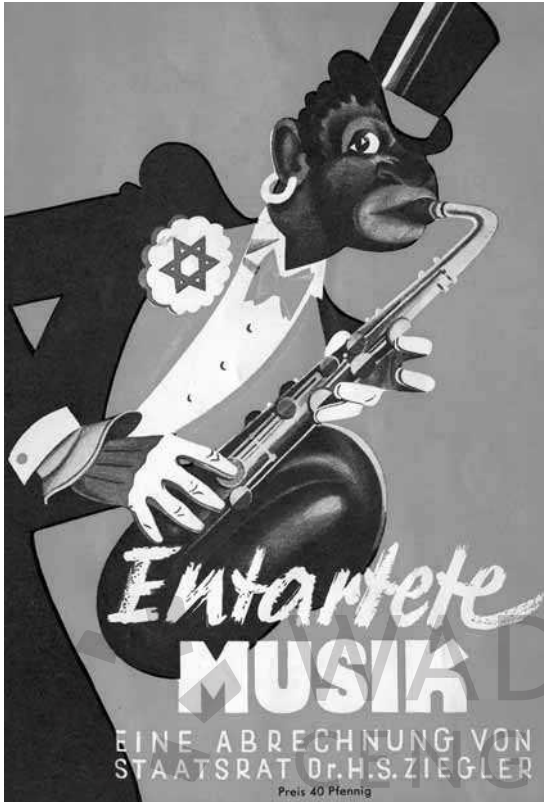
The Nazis instructed teachers how certain subjects were to be taught, and to ensure obedience members of the Hitler Youth were asked to report teachers who did not conform.

In May 1933, professors and students proudly burned books, many of them written by Jews, considered a threat to Nazi ideology, in a display of cultural barbarism that gave prophetic meaning to the famous words of Heinrich Heine, the great nineteenth-century German-Jewish poet: “Wherever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn people.” As books removed from public and private libraries were hurled into the flames, students danced.

Many academics praised Hitler and the new regime. Some 10 percent of the university faculty, principally Jews, Social Democrats, and liberals, were dismissed, and their colleagues often

approved. “From now on it will not be your job to determine whether something is true but whether it is in the spirit of the National Socialist revolution,” the new minister of culture told university professors.²⁶ Numerous courses on “racial science” and Nazi ideology were introduced into the curriculum. Many German academics, some of them noted scholars, willingly, if not enthusiastically, loaned their talents and learning to the new regime.

Symbolic of the Nazi regime were the monster rallies staged at Nuremberg. Scores of thousands roared, marched, and worshiped at their leader’s feet. These true believers, the end product of Nazi indoctrination, celebrated Hitler’s achievements and demonstrated their loyalty to their savior. Everything was brilliantly orchestrated to impress Germans and the world with the irresistible power,



NAZI CULTURE. The Nazis considered jazz to be racially degenerate Jewish and black music.

determination, and unity of the Nazi movement and the greatness of the führer. Armies of youths waving flags, storm troopers bearing weapons, and workers shouldering long-handled spades paraded past Hitler, who stood at attention, his arm extended in the Nazi salute. The endless columns of marchers, the stirring martial music played by huge bands, the forest of flags, the chanting and cheering of spectators, and the burning torches and beaming spotlights united the participants into a racial community. “Wherever Hitler leads we follow,” thundered thousands of Germans in a giant chorus.

Terror was another means of ensuring compliance and obedience. The instruments of terror were the Gestapo and the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), which was organized in 1925 to protect Hitler and other party leaders and to stand guard at party meetings. Under the leadership of Heinrich

Himmler (1900–1945), a fanatical believer in Hitler’s racial theories, the SS was molded into an elite force of disciplined, dedicated, and utterly ruthless men. Many Germans, seduced by Nazi propaganda, accepted terror as a legitimate weapon against subversives and racial defilers who threatened the new Germany. Informers often denounced to the security forces fellow Germans suspected of Communist leanings, having business or sexual relations with Jews, or criticizing Hitler. Recent research shows the Gestapo, relatively few in number, could not function effectively without the assistance of civilians willing to inform on their neighbors and even family members.

Mass Support

The Nazi regime became a police state characterized by mass arrests, the persecution of Jews, and concentration camps that institutionalized terror. Yet fewer heads had rolled than people expected, and in many ways life seemed normal. The Nazis skillfully established the totalitarian state without upsetting the daily life of the great majority of the population. Moreover, Hitler, like Mussolini, was careful to maintain the appearance of legality. By not abolishing parliament or repealing the constitution, he could claim that his was a legitimate government.

To people concerned with little except family, job, and friends—and this includes most people in any country—life in the first few years of the Third Reich seemed quite satisfying. Most Germans believed that the new government was trying to solve Germany’s problems in a vigorous and sensible manner, in contrast to the ineffective Weimar leadership. By 1936, the invigoration of the economy, stimulated in part by rearmament, had virtually eliminated unemployment, which had stood at six million jobless when Hitler took power. An equally astounding achievement in the eyes of the German people was Hitler’s bold termination of the humiliating Versailles treaty, the rebuilding of the German war machine, and the restoration of German power in international affairs. It seemed to most Germans that Hitler had awakened a sense of self-sacrifice and national dedication among

Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.



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YOUNG NAZIS BURNING BOOKS IN SALZBURG, AUSTRIA, 1938. Heinrich Heine, the great nineteenth-century German-Jewish poet, once said that people who burn books end up burning people.

a people dispirited by defeat and economic depression.

The frenzied adoration shown by the German people for Hitler both in peacetime and in war and their faith in his mission to regenerate the German nation is an extraordinary phenomenon that continues to intrigue historians and social psychologists and to astonish new generations of Europeans, including Germans. It was considerably different for other dictators of Hitler's generation. Whatever devotion the Italians felt for Mussolini quickly faded once he brought the country into war. And the Soviet people's bonds to Stalin, particularly for non-Russian ethnic groups, were often based more on fear than genuine adulation. The German people's hero worship of Hitler and their positive view of his dictatorship were not driven by terror and for many endured for the duration of the war. Nor did ordinary Germans have to be coerced to support and serve the Nazi state. Rarely in history has a nation been so spell-bound by a leader.

There was some opposition to the Hitler regime. Social Democrats and Communists in particular organized small cells. Some conservatives, who considered Hitler a threat to traditional German values, and some clergy, who saw Nazism as a pagan religion in conflict with Christian morality, also formed small opposition groups. But only the army could have toppled Hitler. Some generals, even before World War II, urged resistance, but the overwhelming majority of German officers either preferred the new regime—which had smashed Marxism within Germany, destroyed an ineffective democracy, and restored Germany's military might and pride—or considered it dishonorable to break their oath of loyalty to Hitler. Most of these officers would remain loyal until the bitter end. Very few Germans realized that their country was passing through a long night of barbarism, and still fewer considered resistance. The great majority of Germans would remain loyal to their führer and would serve the Nazi regime until its collapse.

LIBERALISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM IN OTHER LANDS

After World War I, in country after country, parliamentary democracy collapsed and authoritarian leaders came to power. In most of these countries, liberal ideals had not penetrated deeply. Proponents of liberalism met resistance from conservative elites.

The Spread of Authoritarianism

Spain and Portugal In both Spain and Portugal, parliamentary regimes faced strong opposition from the church, the army, and large landowners. In 1926, army officers overthrew the Portuguese republic that had been created in 1910, and gradually Antonio de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970), a professor of economics, emerged as dictator. In Spain, after antimonarchist forces won the election of 1931, King Alfonso XIII (1902–1931) left the country, and Spain was proclaimed a republic. But the new government, led by socialists and liberals, faced the determined opposition of the traditional ruling elite. The reforms introduced by the republic—expropriation of large estates, reduction of the number of army officers, dissolution of the Jesuit order, and the closing of church schools—only intensified the old order's hatred.

The difficulties of the Spanish republic mounted: workers, near starvation, rioted and engaged in violent strikes; the military attempted a coup; and Catalonia, with its long tradition of separatism, tried to establish its autonomy. Imitating France (see the upcoming section on France), the parties of the left, including the Communists, united in the Popular Front, which came to power in February 1936. In July 1936, General Francisco Franco (1892–1975), stationed in Spanish Morocco, led a revolt against the republic. He was supported by army leaders, the church, monarchists, landlords, industrialists, and the Falange, a newly formed Fascist party. Spain was torn by a bloody civil war. Aided by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Franco won in 1939 and established a dictatorship.

Eastern and Central Europe Parliamentary government in Eastern Europe rested on weak foundations. Predominantly rural, these countries lacked the sizable professional and commercial classes that had promoted liberalism in Western Europe. Only Czechoslovakia had a substantial native middle class with a strong liberal tradition. The rural masses of Eastern Europe, traditionally subjected to monarchical and aristocratic authority, were not used to political thinking or civic responsibility. Students and intellectuals, often gripped by a romantic nationalism, were drawn to antidemocratic movements. Right-wing leaders also played on the fear of Communism. When parliamentary government failed to solve internal problems, the opponents of the liberal state seized the helm. Fascist movements, however, had little success in Eastern Europe. Rather, authoritarian regimes headed by traditional ruling elites—army leaders or kings—extinguished democracy there.

The Western Democracies

While liberal governments were everywhere failing, the great Western democracies—the United States, Britain, and France—continued to preserve democratic institutions. In Britain and the United States, Fascist movements were merely a nuisance. In France, however, Fascism was more of a threat because it exploited a deeply ingrained hostility in some quarters to the liberal ideals of the French Revolution.

The United States The central problem faced by the Western democracies was the Great Depression, which started in the United States. In the 1920s, hundreds of thousands of Americans had bought stock on credit; this buying spree sent stock prices soaring well beyond what the stocks were actually worth. In late October 1929, the stock market was hit by a wave of panic selling, causing prices to plummet. Within a few weeks, the value of stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange fell by some \$26 billion. A ruinous chain reaction followed over the next few years. Businesses cut production and unemployment soared; farmers who were unable to meet mortgage payments lost their land; banks that had made poor investments closed down. American investors withdrew the

capital they had invested in Europe, causing European banks and businesses to fail. Throughout the world, trade declined and unemployment rose.

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) took office in 1933, more than thirteen million Americans—one-quarter of the labor force—were out of work. Hunger and despair showed on the faces of the American people. Moving away from *laissez faire*, Roosevelt instituted a comprehensive program of national planning, economic experimentation, and reform known as the New Deal. Although the American political and economic system faced a severe test, few Americans turned to Fascism or Communism; the government engaged in national planning but did not break with democratic values and procedures.

Britain Even before the Great Depression, Britain faced severe economic problems. Loss of markets to foreign competitors hurt British manufacturing, mining, and shipbuilding; rapid development of water and oil power reduced the demand for British coal, and outdated mining equipment put Britain in a poor competitive position. To decrease costs, mine owners in 1926 called for salary cuts; the coal miners countered with a strike and were joined by workers in other industries. To many Britons, the workers were leftist radicals trying to overthrow the government. Many wanted the state to break the strike. After nine days, industrial workers called it off, but the miners held out for another six months; they returned to work with longer hours and lower pay. The general strike had failed. However, because the workers had not called for revolution and had refrained from violence, the fear that British workers would follow the Bolshevik path abated.

The Great Depression cast a pall over Britain. The Conservative Party leadership tried to stimulate exports by devaluing the pound and to encourage industry by providing loans at lower interest rates, but in the main it left the task of recovery to industry itself. Not until Britain began to rearm did unemployment decline significantly. Despite the economic slump of the 1920s and the Great Depression, Britain remained politically stable, a testament to the strength of its parliamentary tradition. Neither the Communists nor the newly formed British Union of Fascists gained mass support.

France In the early 1920s, France was concerned with restoring villages, railroads, mines, and forests that had been ruined by the war. From 1926 to 1929, France was relatively prosperous; industrial and agricultural production expanded, tourism increased, and the currency was stable. Although France did not feel the Great Depression as painfully as the United States and Germany, the nation was hurt by the decline in trade and production and the rise in unemployment. The political instability that had beset the Third Republic virtually since its inception continued, and hostility to the republic mounted. The rift between liberals and conservatives, which had divided the country since the Revolution and had grown worse with the Dreyfus affair (see “France: A Troubled Nation” in Chapter 16), continued to plague France during the Depression. As the leading parties failed to solve the nation’s problems, a number of Fascist groups gained strength.

Fear of growing Fascist strength at home and in Italy and Germany led the parties of the left to form the Popular Front. In 1936, Léon Blum (1872–1950), a socialist and a Jew, became premier. Blum’s Popular Front government instituted more reforms than any other ministry in the history of the Third Republic. To end a wave of strikes that tied up production, Blum gave workers a forty-hour week and holidays with pay and guaranteed them the right to collective bargaining. He took steps to nationalize the armaments and aircraft industries. To reduce the influence of the wealthiest families, he put the Bank of France under government control. By raising prices and buying wheat, he aided farmers. Conservatives and Fascists denounced Blum as a Jewish socialist who was converting the fatherland into a Communist state. “Better Hitler than Blum,” grumbled French rightists.

Despite significant reforms, the Popular Front could not revitalize the economy. His political support eroding, Blum resigned in 1937, and the Popular Front, always a tenuous alliance, soon fell apart. Through democratic means, the Blum government had tried to give France its own New Deal, but the social reforms passed by the Popular Front only intensified hatred between the working classes and the rest of the nation. France had preserved democracy against the onslaught of domestic Fascists, but it was a demoralized and divided nation that confronted a united and dynamic Nazi Germany.

INTELLECTUALS AND ARTISTS IN TROUBLED TIMES

The presuppositions of the Enlightenment, already eroding in the decades before World War I, seemed near collapse after 1918—another casualty of trench warfare. Economic distress, particularly during the Great Depression, also profoundly disoriented the European mind. Westerners no longer possessed a frame of reference, a common outlook for understanding themselves, their times, or the past. The core values of Western civilization—the self-sufficiency of reason, the inviolability of the individual, and the existence of objective norms—no longer seemed inspiring or binding.

The crisis of consciousness evoked a variety of responses. Some intellectuals, having lost faith in the essential meaning of Western civilization, turned their backs on it or found escape in their art. Others sought a new hope in the Soviet experiment or in Fascism. Still others reaffirmed the rational humanist tradition of the Enlightenment. Repelled by the secularism, materialism, and rootlessness of the modern age, Christian thinkers urged Westerners to find renewed meaning and purpose in their ancestral religion. A philosophical movement called existentialism, which rose to prominence after World War II, aspired to make life authentic in a world stripped of universal values.

Postwar Pessimism

After World War I, Europeans looked at themselves and their civilization differently. It seemed that in science and technology they had unleashed powers that they could not control, and belief in the stability and security of European civilization appeared to be an illusion. Also illusory was the expectation that reason would banish surviving signs of darkness, ignorance, and injustice and usher in an age of continual progress. European intellectuals felt that they were living in a “broken world.” In an age of heightened brutality and mobilized irrationality, the values of old Europe seemed beyond recovery. “All the great words,” wrote D. H. Lawrence “were cancelled out for that generation.”²⁷ The fissures discernible in European civilization before 1914 had grown wider and deeper. To be sure, Europe

also had its optimists—those who found reason for hope in the League of Nations and in the easing of international tensions and improved economic conditions in the mid-1920s. However, the Great Depression and the triumph of totalitarianism intensified feelings of doubt and disillusionment.

Expressions of pessimism abounded after World War I. In 1919, Paul Valéry stated: “We modern civilizations have learned to recognize that we are mortal like the others. We feel that a civilization is as fragile as life.”²⁸ “We are living today under the sign of the collapse of civilization,”²⁹ declared humanitarian Albert Schweitzer in 1923. German philosopher Karl Jaspers noted in 1932 that “there is a growing awareness of imminent ruin tantamount to a dread of the approaching end of all that makes life worthwhile.”³⁰

T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) also conveys a sense of foreboding. In his image of a collapsing European civilization, Eliot creates a macabre scenario. Hooded hordes, modern-day barbarians, swarm over plains and lay waste to cities. Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London—each once a great spiritual or cultural center—are now “falling towers.” Amid this destruction, one hears “high in the air / Murmur of maternal lamentation.”³¹

Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychologist, stated in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933):

*I believe I am not exaggerating when I say that modern man has suffered an almost fatal shock, psychologically speaking, and as a result has fallen into profound uncertainty. . . . The revolution in our conscious outlook, brought about by the catastrophic results of the World War, shows itself in our inner life by the shattering of our faith in ourselves and our own worth. . . . I realize only too well that I am losing my faith in the possibility of a rational organization of the world, the old dream of the millennium, in which peace and harmony should rule, has grown pale.*³²

In 1936, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga wrote in a chapter entitled “Apprehension of Doom”:

We are living in a demented world. And we know it. . . . Everywhere there are doubts as to the solidity of our social structure, vague

*fears of the imminent future, a feeling that our civilization is on the way to ruin. . . . almost all things which once seemed sacred and immutable have now become unsettled, truth and humanity, justice and reason. . . . The sense of living in the midst of a violent crisis of civilization, threatening complete collapse, has spread far and wide.*³³

The most influential expression of pessimism was Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. The first volume was published in July 1918, as the Great War was drawing to a close, and the second volume in 1922. The work achieved instant notoriety, particularly in Spengler's native Germany, shattered by defeat. Spengler viewed history as an assemblage of many different cultures, which, like living organisms, experience birth, youth, maturity, and death. What contemporaries pondered most was Spengler's insistence that Western civilization had entered its final stage and that its death could not be averted.

To an already troubled Western world, Spengler offered no solace. The West, like other cultures and like any living organism, was destined to die; its decline was irreversible and its death inevitable, and the symptoms of degeneration were already evident. Spengler's gloomy prognostication buttressed the Fascists, who claimed that they were creating a new civilization on the ruins of the dying European civilization.

Literature and Art: Innovation, Disillusionment, and Social Commentary

Postwar pessimism did not prevent writers and artists from continuing the cultural innovations begun before the war. In the works of D. H. Lawrence, Marcel Proust, André Gide, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot, and Thomas Mann, the modernist movement achieved a brilliant flowering. Often these writers gave expression to the troubles and uncertainties of the postwar period.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924), a Czech Jew, grasped the dilemma of the modern age perhaps better than any other novelist of his generation. In Kafka's world, human beings are caught in a bureaucratic web that they cannot control. They

live in a nightmare society dominated by oppressive, cruel, and corrupt officials and amoral torturers: a world where cruelty and injustice are accepted facts of existence, power is exercised without limits, and victims cooperate in their own destruction. Traditional values and ordinary logic do not operate in such a world. In *The Trial* (1925), for example, the hero is arrested without knowing why, and he is eventually executed, a victim of institutional evil that breaks and destroys him "like a dog." In these observations, Kafka proved to be a prophet of the emerging totalitarian state. (Kafka's three sisters perished in the Holocaust.)

Kafka expressed the feelings of alienation and isolation that characterize the modern individual; he explored life's dreads and absurdities, offering no solutions or consolation. In Kafka's works, people are defeated and unable to comprehend the irrational forces that contribute to their destruction. The mind yearns for coherence, but, Kafka tells us, uncertainty, if not chaos, governs human relationships. We can be sure neither of our own identities nor of the world we encounter, for human beings are the playthings of unfathomable forces, too irrational to master.

Before World War I, German writer Thomas Mann (1875–1955) had earned a reputation for his short stories and novels, particularly *Buddenbrooks* (1901), which portrays the decline of a prosperous bourgeois family. In *The Magic Mountain* (1924), Mann reflected on the decomposition of bourgeois European civilization. The setting for the story is a Swiss sanitarium whose patients, drawn from several European lands, suffer from tuberculosis. The sanitarium symbolizes Europe, and it is the European psyche that is diseased. *The Magic Mountain* raised, but did not resolve, crucial questions. Was the epoch of rational humanist culture drawing to a close? Did Europeans welcome their spiritual illness in the same way that some of the patients in the sanitarium had a will to illness? How could Europe rescue itself from decadence?

In 1931, two years before Hitler took power, Mann, in an article entitled "An Appeal to Reason," described National Socialism and the extreme nationalism it espoused as a rejection of the Western rational tradition and a regression

to primitive and barbaric modes of behavior. Nazism, he wrote, “is distinguished by . . . its absolute unrestraint, its orgiastic, radically anti-humane, frenziedly dynamic character. . . . Everything is possible, everything is permitted as a weapon against human decency. . . . Fanaticism turns into a means of salvation . . . politics becomes an opiate for the masses . . . and reason veils her face.”³⁴

Shattered by World War I, disgusted by Fascism’s growing strength, and moved by the suffering caused by the Depression, many writers became committed to social and political causes. Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) was one of many antiwar novels. George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) recorded the bleak lives of English workers. In *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), John Steinbeck captured the anguish of American farmers driven from their land by the Dust Bowl and foreclosure during the Depression. Few issues stirred the conscience of intellectuals as did the Spanish Civil War, and many of them volunteered to fight with the Spanish republicans against the Fascists. Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) expressed the sentiments of these idealists.

The new directions taken in art before World War I—abstractionism and expressionism—continued in the postwar decades. Picasso, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Matisse, Rouault, Braque, Modigliani, and other masters continued to refine their styles. In addition, new art trends emerged, mirroring the trauma of a generation that had experienced the war and lost its faith in Europe’s moral and intellectual values.

In 1915 in Zurich, artists and writers founded a movement, called Dada, to express their revulsion against the war and the civilization that spawned it. From neutral Switzerland, the movement spread to Germany and Paris. Dada shared in the postwar mood of disorientation and despair. Dadaists viewed life as essentially absurd (*Dada* is a nonsense term) and cultivated indifference. “The acts of life have no beginning or end. Everything happens in a completely idiotic way,”³⁵ declared the poet Tristan Tzara, one of Dada’s founders and its chief spokesman. Dadaists expressed contempt for artistic and literary standards and rejected both God and reason. “Through reason man becomes a

tragic and ugly figure,” said one Dadaist; “beauty is dead,” said another. Tzara declared:

*What good did the theories of the philosophers do us? Did they help us to take a single step forward or backward? . . . We have had enough of the intelligent movements that have stretched beyond measure our credulity in the benefits of science. What we want now is spontaneity. . . . because everything that issues freely from ourselves, without the intervention of speculative ideas, represents us.*³⁶

For Dadaists, the world was nonsensical and reality disordered; hence, they offered no solutions to anything. “Like everything in life, Dada is useless,”³⁷ said Tzara. Despite their nihilistic aims and “calculated irrationality,” however, Dadaist artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, were innovative and creative.

Dada ended as a formal movement in 1924 and was succeeded by surrealism. Surrealists inherited from Dada a contempt for reason; they stressed fantasy and made use of Freudian insights and symbols in their art to reproduce the raw state of the unconscious and to arrive at truths beyond reason’s grasp. In their attempt to break through the constraints of rationality to reach a higher reality—that is, a “surreality”—leading surrealists such as Max Ernst (1891–1976), Salvador Dali (1904–1989), and Joan Miro (1893–1983) used unconventional techniques to depict an external world devoid of logic and normal appearances.

Like writers, artists expressed a social conscience. George Grosz combined a Dadaist sense of life’s meaninglessness with a new realism to depict the moral degeneration of middle-class German society. In *After the Questioning* (1935), Grosz, then living in the United States, dramatized Nazi brutality; in *The End of the World* (1936), he expressed his fear of another impending world war. Käthe Kollwitz, also a German artist, showed a deep compassion for the sufferer: the unemployed, the hungry, the ill, and the politically oppressed. William Gropper’s *Migration* (1932) dramatized the suffering of the same dispossessed farmers described in Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Philip Evergood, in *Don’t Cry Mother* (1938–1944), portrayed the apathy of starving children and their mother’s terrible helplessness.



THE NIGHT (1918–1919), BY MAX BECKMANN (1884–1950). Max Beckmann's paintings gave expression to the disillusionment and spiritual unease that afflicted postwar Germany. When the Nazis included his works in the Degenerate Art Exhibition (1937), he left the country. In *The Night*, Beckmann, himself a veteran of the front, depicts brutal men engaging in terrible violence. (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Estate of Max Beckmann/© 2005 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.)

In his etchings of maimed, dying, and dead soldiers, German artist Otto Dix produced a powerful visual indictment of the Great War's cruelty and suffering. Max Beckmann's service in the German army during World War I made him acutely aware of violence and brutality, which he expressed in *The Night* (1918–1919) and other paintings. Designated a “degenerate artist” by the Nazis, Beckmann went into exile. In *Guernica* (1937), Picasso memorialized the Spanish village decimated by saturation bombing during the Spanish Civil War. In the *White Crucifixion* (1938), Marc Chagall, a Russian-born Jew who had settled in Paris, depicted the terror and flight of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Communism: “The God That Failed”

The economic misery of the Depression and the rise of Fascist barbarism led many intellectuals to find a new hope, even a secular faith, in Communism. They considered the Soviet experiment a new beginning that promised a better future for all humanity. These intellectuals praised the Soviet Union—a “workers’ paradise”—for supplanting capitalist greed with socialist cooperation, for replacing a haphazard economic system marred by repeated depressions with one based on planned production, and for providing employment for everyone when joblessness was endemic in capitalist lands. American literary critic Edmund Wilson said that in the Soviet Union one felt

at the “moral top of the world where the light never really goes out.”³⁸ To these intellectuals, it seemed that in the Soviet Union a vigorous and healthy civilization was emerging and that only Communism could stem the tide of Fascism. For many, however, the attraction was short lived. Sickened by Stalin’s purges and terror, the denial of individual freedom, and the suppression of truth, they came to view the Soviet Union as another totalitarian state and Communism as another “god that failed.”

One such intellectual was Arthur Koestler (1905–1983). Born in Budapest of Jewish ancestry and educated in Vienna, Koestler worked as a correspondent for a leading Berlin newspaper chain. He joined the Communist Party at the very end of 1931 because he “lived in a disintegrating society thirsting for faith,” was moved by the misery caused by the Depression, and saw Communism as the “only force capable of resisting the onrush of the primitive [Nazi] horde.”³⁹ Koestler visited the Soviet Union in 1933, experiencing firsthand both the starvation brought on by forced collectivization and the propaganda that grotesquely misrepresented life in Western lands. While his faith was shaken, he did not break with the party until 1938, in response to Stalin’s liquidations.

In *Darkness at Noon* (1941), Koestler explored the attitudes of the Old Bolsheviks who were imprisoned, tortured, and executed by Stalin. These dedicated Communists had served the party faithfully, but Stalin, fearing opposition, hating intellectuals, and driven by megalomania, denounced them as enemies of the people. In *Darkness at Noon*, the leading character, the imprisoned Rubashov, is a composite of the Old Bolsheviks. Although innocent, Rubashov, without being physically tortured, publicly confesses to political crimes that he never committed.

Rubashov is aware of the suffering that the party has brought to the Russian people:

*[I]n the interests of a just distribution of land we deliberately let die of starvation about five million farmers and their families in one year. . . . [To liberate] human beings from the shackles of industrial exploitation . . . we sent about ten million people to do forced labour in the Arctic regions . . . under conditions similar to those of antique galley slaves.*⁴⁰

Pained by his own complicity in the party’s crimes, including the betrayal of friends, Rubashov

questions the party’s philosophy that the individual should be subordinated and, if necessary, sacrificed to the regime. Nevertheless, Rubashov remains the party’s faithful servant; true believers do not easily break with their faith. By confessing, Rubashov performs his last service for the revolution. For the true believer, everything—truth, justice, and the sanctity of the individual—is properly sacrificed to the party.

Reaffirming the Christian Worldview

By calling into question core liberal beliefs—the essential goodness of human nature, the primacy of reason, the efficacy of science, and the inevitability of progress—World War I led thinkers to find in Christianity an alternative view of the human experience and the crisis of the twentieth century. Christian thinkers, including Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Christopher Dawson, Jacques Maritain, and T. S. Eliot, affirmed the reality of evil in human nature. They assailed liberals and Marxists for holding too optimistic a view of human nature and human reason and for postulating a purely rational and secular philosophy of history. For these thinkers, the Christian conception of history as a clash between human will and God’s commands provided an intelligible explanation of the tragedies of the twentieth century. They agreed with the leading French Catholic thinker Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), who argued that “anthropomorphic humanism,” which held that human beings by themselves alone can define life’s purpose and create their own values, had utterly failed. Without guidance from a transcendental source, Maritain insisted, reason is powerless to control irrational drives, which threaten to degrade human existence. Without commitment to God’s values, we find substitute faiths in fanatic and belligerent ideologies and unscrupulous leaders. For democracy to survive, he said, it must be infused with Christian love and compassion.

Reaffirming the Ideals of Reason and Freedom

Several thinkers tried to reaffirm the ideals of rationality and freedom that had been trampled by totalitarian movements. In *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927), Julien Benda (1867–1956),

a French cultural critic of Jewish background, castigated intellectuals for intensifying hatred between nations, classes, and political factions. “Our age is indeed the age of the *intellectual organization of political hatreds*,” he wrote. These intellectuals, said Benda, do not pursue justice or truth but proclaim that “even if our country is wrong, we must think of it in the right.” They scorn outsiders, extol harshness and action, and proclaim the superiority of instinct and will to intelligence; or they “assert that the intelligence to be venerated is that which limits its activities within the bounds of national interest.” The logical end of this xenophobia, said Benda, “is the organized slaughter of nations and classes.”⁴¹

José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), descendant of a noble Spanish family and a professor of philosophy, gained international recognition with the publication of *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930). According to Ortega, European civilization, the product of a creative elite, was degenerating into barbarism because of the growing power of the masses, for the masses lacked the mental discipline and commitment to reason needed to preserve Europe’s intellectual and cultural traditions. Ortega did not equate the masses with the working class and the elite with the nobility; it was an attitude of mind, not a class affiliation, that distinguished the “mass-man” from the elite.

The mass-man, said Ortega, has a commonplace mind and does not set high standards for himself. Faced with a problem, he “is satisfied with thinking the first thing he finds in his head,” and “crushes . . . everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified, and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.”⁴² Such intellectually vulgar people, declared Ortega, cannot understand or preserve the processes of civilization. The Fascists, for him, exemplified this revolt of the masses:

*Under Fascism there appears for the first time in Europe a type of man who does not want to give reasons or to be right, but simply shows himself resolved to impose his opinions. This is the new thing: the right not to be reasonable, the “reason of unreason.” Hence I see the most palpable manifestation of the new mentality of the masses, due to their having decided to rule society without the capacity for doing so.*⁴³

Since the mass-man does not respect the tradition of reason, he does not enter into rational dialogue with others or defend his opinions logically, said Ortega. Rejecting reason, the mass-man glorifies violence—the ultimate expression of barbarism. As Ortega saw it, if European civilization was to be rescued from Fascism and Communism, the elite must sustain civilized values and provide leadership for the masses.

A staunch defender of the Enlightenment tradition, Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), a German philosopher of Jewish lineage, emigrated after Hitler came to power, eventually settling in the United States. Just prior to Hitler’s triumph, in 1932, Cassirer wrote about the need to uphold and reenergize that tradition: “More than ever before, it seems to me, the time is again ripe for applying . . . self-criticism to the present age, for holding up to it that bright clear mirror fashioned by the Enlightenment. . . . The age which venerated reason and science as man’s highest faculty cannot and must not be lost even for us.”⁴⁴

In his last work, *The Myth of the State* (1946), Cassirer described Nazism as the triumph of mythical thinking over reason. The Nazis, he wrote, cleverly manufactured myths—of the race, the leader, the party, the state—that disoriented the intellect. The Germans who embraced these myths surrendered their capacity for independent judgment, leaving themselves vulnerable to manipulation by the Nazi leadership. To contain the destructive powers of political myths, Cassirer urged strengthening the rational humanist tradition and called for the critical study of political myths, for “in order to fight an enemy you must know him. . . . We should carefully study the origin, the structure, the methods, and the technique of the political myths. We should see the adversary face to face in order to know how to combat him.”⁴⁵

George Orwell (1903–1950), a British novelist and political journalist, wrote two powerful indictments of totalitarianism: *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949). In *Animal Farm*, based in part on his experiences with Communists during the Spanish Civil War, Orwell satirized the totalitarian regime built by Lenin and Stalin in Russia. In *1984*, Orwell, who was deeply committed to human dignity and freedom, warned that these great principles were now permanently menaced by the concentration and abuse of political power. “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot



G. Pierre/Corbis/Sigma.

JEAN PAUL SARTRE AND SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR. Existentialism was a major philosophical movement of the twentieth century. Sartre and de Beauvoir were two of its principle exponents.

stamping on a human face forever,” says a member of the ruling elite as he tortures a victim in the dungeons of the Thought Police.⁴⁶

The society of 1984 is ruled by the Inner Party, which constitutes some 2 percent of the population. Heading the Party is Big Brother—most likely a mythical figure created by the ruling elite to satisfy people’s yearning for a leader. The Party indoctrinates people to love Big Brother, whose picture is everywhere. The Ministry of Truth resorts to thought control to dominate and manipulate the masses and to keep Party members loyal and subservient. Independent thinking is destroyed. Objective truth no longer exists. Truth is whatever the Party decrees at the moment. If the Party were to proclaim that two plus two equals five, it would have to be believed. In this totalitarian society of the future, all human rights are abolished, people are arrested merely for their thoughts, and children spy on their parents.

EXISTENTIALISM

The philosophical movement that best exemplified the anxiety and uncertainty of Europe in an era of world wars was existentialism. Like writers and

artists, existentialist philosophers were responding to a European civilization that seemed to be in the throes of dissolution. Although existentialism was most popular after World War II, expressing the anxiety and despair of many intellectuals who had lost confidence in reason and progress, several of its key works were written prior to or during the war.

What route should people take in a world where old values and certainties had dissolved, where universal truth was rejected and God’s existence denied? How could people cope in a society where they were menaced by technology, manipulated by impersonal bureaucracies, and overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety? If the universe lacks any overarching meaning, what meaning could one give to one’s own life? These questions were at the crux of existentialist philosophy.

Existentialism does not lend itself to a single definition, for its principal theorists did not adhere to a common body of doctrines. For example, some existentialists were atheists, like Jean Paul Sartre, or omitted God from their thought, like Martin Heidegger; others, like Karl Jaspers, believed in God but not in Christian doctrines; still others, like Gabriel Marcel and Nikolai Berdyaev, were Christians; and Martin Buber was a believing Jew.

That there are no timeless truths that exist independently of and prior to the individual human being and that serve as ultimate standards of virtue is a core principle of existentialism. Existence—our presence in the here-and-now—precedes and takes precedence over any presumed absolute values. The moral and spiritual values that society tries to impose cannot define the individual person's existence. Our traditional morality rests on no foundation whose certainty can be either demonstrated by reason or guaranteed by God. There are simply no transcendent absolutes; to think otherwise is to surrender to illusion. It is the first principle of existentialism, said Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980), the prominent French existentialist, that we must choose our own ethics, define ourselves, and give our own meaning to our life.

For existentialists, human nature is not fixed or constant; each person is like no other. Self-realization comes when one affirms one's own uniqueness. One becomes less than human when one permits one's life to be determined by a mental outlook—a set of rules and values—imposed by others.

Existentialists maintained that we are alone in a universe that is indifferent to our expectations and needs, and death is ever stalking us. Awareness of this elementary fact of existence evokes a sense of overwhelming anxiety and depression. Existence is essentially absurd. There is no purpose to our presence in the universe. We simply find ourselves here; we do not know and will never find out why. Compared with the eternity of time that preceded our birth and will follow our death, the short duration of our existence seems trivial and inexplicable. And death, which irrevocably terminates our existence, testifies to the ultimate absurdity of life. We are free. We must face squarely the fact that existence is purposeless and absurd. In doing so, we can give our life meaning. It is in the act of choosing freely from among different possibilities that the individual shapes an authentic existence. There is a dynamic quality to human existence; the individual has the potential to become more than he or she is.

THE MODERN PREDICAMENT

The process of fragmentation in European thought and arts, which had begun at the end of the nineteenth century, accelerated after World War I.

Increasingly, philosophers, writers, and artists expressed disillusionment with the rational humanist tradition of the Enlightenment. They no longer shared the Enlightenment's confidence in either reason's capabilities or human goodness, and they viewed perpetual progress as an illusion.

For some thinkers, the crucial problem was the great change in the European understanding of truth. Since the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece, Western thinkers had believed in the existence of objective, universal truths: truths that were inherent in nature and applied to all peoples at all times. (Christianity, of course, also taught the reality of truth as revealed by God.) It was held that such truths—the natural rights of the individual, for example—could be apprehended by the intellect and could serve as a standard for individual aspirations and social life. The recognition of these universal principles, it was believed, compelled people to measure the world of the here-and-now in the light of rational and universal norms and to institute appropriate reforms. It was the task of philosophy to reconcile human existence with the objective order.

During the nineteenth century, the existence of universal truth came into doubt. A growing historical consciousness led some thinkers to maintain that what people considered truth was merely a reflection of their culture at a given stage in history—their perception of things at a specific point in the evolution of human consciousness. These thinkers held that universal truths were not woven into the fabric of nature. There were no natural rights of life, liberty, and property that constituted the individual's birthright; there were no standards of justice or equality inherent in nature and ascertainable by reason. Rather, people themselves elevated the beliefs and values of an age to the status of objective truth. The normative principles—the self-evident truths proclaimed by Jefferson—which for the philosophes constituted a standard for political and social reform and a guarantee of human rights, were no longer linked to the natural order, to an objective reality that could be confirmed by reason. As Hannah Arendt noted, “We certainly no longer believe, as the men of the French Revolution did, in a universal cosmos of which man was a part and whose natural laws he had to imitate and conform to.”⁴⁷

This radical break with the traditional attitude toward truth contributed substantially to the crisis of European consciousness that marked

the first half of the twentieth century. Traditional values and beliefs, whether those inherited from the Enlightenment or those taught by Christianity, no longer gave Europeans a sense of certainty and security. People were left without a normative order to serve as a guide to living—and without such a guide might be open to nihilism. For if nothing is fundamentally true—if there are no principles of morality and justice that emanate from God or can be derived from reason—then it can be concluded, as Nietzsche understood, that everything is permitted. Some scholars interpreted Nazism as the culminating expression of a nihilistic attitude grown ever more brutal.

By the early twentieth century, the attitude of Westerners toward reason had undergone a radical transformation. Some thinkers, who had placed their hopes in the rational tradition of the Enlightenment, were distressed by reason's inability to resolve the tensions and conflicts of modern industrial society. Moreover, the growing recognition of the non-rational—of human actions determined by hidden impulses—led people to doubt that reason played the dominant role in human behavior. Other thinkers viewed the problem of reason differently. They assailed the attitude of mind that found no room for Christianity because its teachings did not pass the test of reason and science. Or they attacked reason for fashioning a technological and bureaucratic society that devalued and crushed human passions and stifled individuality. These thinkers insisted that human beings cannot fulfill their potential, cannot live wholly, if their feelings are denied. They agreed with D. H. Lawrence's critique of rationalism: "The attribution of rationality to human nature, instead of enriching it, now seems to me to have impoverished it. It ignored certain powerful and valuable springs of feeling. Some of the spontaneous, irrational

outbursts of human nature can have a sort of value from which our schematism was cut off."⁴⁸

While many thinkers focused on reason's limitations, others, particularly existentialists, pointed out that reason was a double-edged sword: it could demean, as well as ennoble and liberate, the individual. These thinkers attacked all theories that subordinated the individual to a rigid ideological or political system.

Responding to the critics of reason, its defenders insisted that it was necessary to reaffirm the rational tradition first proclaimed by the Greeks and given its modern expression by the Enlightenment. Reason, they maintained, was indispensable to civilization. What these thinkers advocated was broadening the scope of reason to accommodate the insights into human nature advanced by the romantics, Nietzsche, Freud, modernist writers and artists, and others who explored the world of feelings, will, and the subconscious. They also stressed the need to humanize reason so that it could never threaten to reduce a human being to a thing—a mere instrument used to realize some socioeconomic blueprint.

In the decades shaped by world wars and totalitarianism, intellectuals raised questions that went to the heart of the dilemma of modern life. How can civilized life be safeguarded against human irrationality, particularly when it is channeled into political ideologies that idolize the state, the leader, the party, or the race? How can individual human personality be rescued from a relentless rationalism that organizes the individual as it would any material object? Do the values associated with the Enlightenment provide a sound basis on which to integrate society? Can the individual find meaning in what many now regarded as a meaningless universe? World War II and the Holocaust gave these questions a special poignancy.

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